

OUR ANTIMATRIMONIAL CLUB.

BY MARY FRANCES WILLIAMS.

"No, sir!" said Julian Ferrean energetically, as he tossed his cigar away preparatory to joining the ladies: "I'm not a marrying man. In my humble opinion, about the worst thing a man can do with himself is to slip his neck into the matrimonial noose!"

"What! *you*?" cried Tom Revere. "You holding forth against matrimony, with your reputation for gallantry, and your confessed adoration of the lovely sex? I'm thunder-struck!"

"Certainly, I adore the ladies: I've much too high a regard for them to wish them condemned to such a state of servitude. Tie a woman down to the cares and vexations of married life; subject her to the whims of a man whom she is bound to obey; and make her the worried slave of half a dozen young torments, — and you've

spoiled her!" concluded Julian, with some excitement.

A vociferous clapping of hands from the adjacent bay-window greeted this peroration, and the energetic orator, who had not been aware of any audience save Tom Revere, was rather discomposed to find himself declaiming before half a dozen girls, and three or four masculine satellites of the same; while a chorus of laughing voices added their din to that of the applauding hands.

"Bravo! Ferrean, relieve your mind, if you do astonish the public! Who cares for the fitness of things?" roared Harry Blount's thundering bass above all the shrill outcry.

"Upon my word, Mr. Ferrean, if I had known you were not a marrying man, I'd never have given you all those waltzes! I

renounce you, sir, henceforth and forever!" laughed Annie Grierson.

"Sound sense, every word of it, Mr. Ferrean!" declared Belle Blount, emphatically.

"Vewy neat, Ferwean; vewy neat, and extremely well put," drawled Sidney Phillips, the greatest fop and dandy of our set, but a man whom none of us liked to anger.

"What egregious nonsense, Julian!" said pretty, piquante Rose Ferrean.

"Come in, Julian, won't you?" said his cousin, Edna Reese.

Julian followed Tom Revere, who had already entered the house; and, coming into the drawing-room, found that worthy established beside his particular affinity, blue-eyed Annie Grierson.

Our party were spending the afternoon at Chetwoode Hill, in honor of Miss Blanche Chetwoode's arrival, and for the purpose of making that young lady's acquaintance. She was a cousin of Nora Chetwoode, from the city, and we had been so long accustomed to hear Nora rave about her, that we were all anxious to meet the paragon. So, when we received Nora's notes, announcing her visit and inviting us to make a little informal party for her, each and every one of us donned his most impressive attire, and made himself as killing as possible, and repaired to Chetwoode Hill, — speaking only for the masculine members of the party, because the ladies did not appear to be gotten up with any unusual degree of sumptuousness; but then you never can be sure whether a lady has spent three hours or ten minutes in the preparation of her toilet.

I may as well confess that I, Richard Brandon, attorney at law, left my office during business hours, took this unusual pains with my personal appearance, and walked a mile to Chetwoode Hill that warm June day, caring very little whether Miss Blanche Chetwoode were beautiful as an houri or ugly as a Gorgon, provided only that little Nora was gracious and sweet to me. I did confess it to Rose Ferrean, and she said I had more sense than she gave me credit for.

We were the first party to arrive; Rose Ferrean and I, Edna Reese and Julian. Nora met us at the door, her hazel eyes shining, her jetty curls dancing all around her pretty little head, looking altogether such a charming picture of delight and satisfaction that I inwardly renewed my vow

to propose upon the very first eligible opportunity. Ah! little did I think that, within three hours, I should voluntarily renounce that vow, and — but I will not anticipate.

Nora led us to the drawing-room, and introduced us to Blanche Chetwoode. Julian Ferrean was the first to be presented, and I saw by his face that he was profoundly impressed. And no wonder, for the girl was a marvel; stately and slender as a lily, and as white, though her heavy braids were like jet, and matched her sloe-black eyes. There was a dainty tint of pink upon her cheeks, and her mouth was like a coral bow. She wore a thin black dress, and had yellow lilies in her hair and on her bosom; the effect of which attire was artistically perfect.

Julian Ferrean, tall, fair-haired, elegant Julian, for whom the girls "pulled caps," and were jealous of each other; with whose blue eyes and blonde mustache they were wont to be smitten at first sight; and who gallantly distributed his attentions among them all, with such perfect impartiality that they called him "everybody's beau," — he seemed to strike Miss Chetwoode very favorably, for I saw an expression of positive admiration in her face as he bowed low before her. "Here," I thought, "is the beginning of a romance."

Therefore nobody was more surprised than I to hear Julian, who, a little later, had been out to smoke with Tom Revere, get off that speech against matrimony which the company received with such various comments. I was equally surprised to see Blanche Chetwoode turn around with approving eyes as he entered, and to hear her say, in her sweet, distinct voice, —

"Mr. Ferrean, I heartily agree with you. It appears to me that the institution of marriage, as it exists at present, is a miserable failure."

Julian looked rather taken by surprise, but he bowed with something more than his usual air of deference.

"I am flattered to find that Miss Chetwoode and myself are of the same opinion," he said.

"I have long held that opinion," said Miss Chetwoode, gravely. "I think no woman could have a true regard for a man, and yet be willing to impose upon him the burdens which matrimony, except in the most unusual cases, must entail; nor could a man who possessed any feeling of chivalry introduce the woman whom he professed to

love into that which Mr. Ferrean well calls a state of servitude. I believe there is a Platonic regard which may and should exist between persons of opposite sex, and which would be far more satisfactory and elevating than that senseless passion called love!"

This speech, certainly a remarkable one for a young lady to make, was received in silence by all save Rose Ferrean; she turned up her pretty little nose, and said, simply but forcibly, "Oh, pshaw!"

For which irreverent remark Miss Rose was rewarded by a glance of scathing rebuke from her brother, who had been regarding Miss Chetwoode's animated face in silent and admiring approval. After a little, Belle Blount spoke, in her decisive fashion, —

"You are right, Miss Chetwoode. I do not believe in matrimony, and I think love and love-making about the most stupid business one could possibly engage in."

Sidney Phillips shot an odd side-look at the handsome black-eyed Belle; and I, who knew Sidney pretty well, had never seen that look in his sleepy gray eyes except when he meditated some piece of *diablerie*. He had told me once that he meant to marry Belle Blount; not that he had offered himself to her, nor, indeed, that he had ever been especially attentive to her; but I believed implicitly from that hour that Belle would be the future Mrs. Phillips. Sidney was accustomed to have his own way: no one ever knew him to fail in any undertaking. But now he said, in his laziest drawl, —

"Weally, now, Miss Belle, would you accept that sort of Platonic friendship that Miss Chetwoode wferred to, aw — in pwefewence to — aw — matrimony?"

There were occasions when Sidney's lisp and drawl were terribly exasperating; and there were other times when his peculiarities of speech were indescribably funny. Harry Blount used to tell a story about him, — how once at college he entered the class-room with considerable animation, and remarked, in the most excited tone he had ever been heard to use, —

"Boys, there's a wumpus down stweet!"

"A what?" was the astonished inquiry from several of his chums: to which he responded, —

"A wiot!"

"What?"

"A wow!" shouted Sidney, furiously; and, covered with wrath and confusion, he hastily retreated, followed by the uproarious

laughter of the fellows. We all believed this story, because Sidney invariably "got mad" when Harry told it: which he did pretty frequently.

However, Belle Blount did not seem to see anything amusing in Sidney's affection just now. Her cheeks were very red, and her tone was undeniably snappish. As she answered him, —

"Most decidedly, yes!"

"Aw — yaas; weally, now, matwimony — a good deal of a boah," continued Sidney, contemplatively. "Doosed uncertain: if a fellah makes a mistake he cah'n't have a chance to wectify it."

"That is very true, Mr. Phillips," observed Miss Chetwoode. "I consider that an insuperable objection to marriage: one may be happy; but if one is miserable, there is no return; and the risk is too great."

"Blanche, dear," said Nora Chetwoode, a little timidly, for Blanche was her oracle, "don't you ever mean to marry?"

"Never!"

It is quite impossible to describe the tone and manner of Blanche Chetwoode as she said that. The little word sounded as impressive as three hours of eloquence could have done.

"And I am with you there, Miss Chetwoode!" cried Belle Blount, as, with glowing cheeks, she impulsively held out her hand to Blanche.

That young lady clasped it for a moment with a firm, steady hand that seemed a little mesmeric in its touch; for Belle's face took on the exact expression of her own as she said, —

"Then we are allied, Miss Blount."

"Will you admit a third party to your compact? You have heard me announce myself a bachelor sworn." And Julian Ferrean stood before Miss Chetwoode with outstretched hand.

"Aw — me too, Miss Chetwoode?"

That was Sidney Phillips, and he also was offering his hand.

"I'm weady to take the oath," said he.

"I declare!" cried Rose Ferrean, with wide-open, astonished eyes. "You're actually resolving yourselves into an anti-matrimonial club!"

"Vewy good ideah, Miss Wose," lisped Sidney. "I pwopose we do just that, and Miss Chetwoode shall administer the obligation. She is the owiginator of this upwising."

"You mistake," laughed Annie Grierson. "It was Mr. Ferrean."

"Well," said Belle Blount, with enthusiasm, "is it not a grand idea, whoever originated it? Let us all unite and pledge ourselves never to enter into the miserable bondage of married life; and let us all help each other to keep that resolution! Shall it be so?"

Sidney and Julian simultaneously bowed; and Miss Chetwoode gave them a smile of such bewildering splendor that Tom Revere, ambitious of winning the like for himself, started up, and avowed himself a convert to Miss Chetwoode's theory.

Then came Edna Reese and Eustace Hardy, Harry Blount and Annie Grierson. I firmly believe to this hour that Blanche Chetwoode had the power of fascination, and could bend others to her will, like the sirens of the old legend. It struck me as almost an uncanny thing to see them all crowding up to clasp her hand, as if she were the priestess of a new religion, and they her converts, offering their vows upon that soft, white palm.

I know not what instinct of evil made me turn to look at Nora Chetwoode; and I saw her bending a little forward over the table at which she stood, her lips half-parted, and a deep flush upon either cheek; while her eyes were deliberately fixed upon her cousin's face.

My heart gave a sudden bound as I thought, "Good heaven! is little Nora going to rush into this folly along with the other lunatics? She shall not do it! I'll put a stop to it."

I made one step forward, but I was too late. Blanche Chetwoode looked up and caught Nora's eye just then, and before I could speak, she said, smiling, —

"Well, Nora, how is it with you, *petite*?"

And the next minute Nora was at her side, and Nora's hand was clasped with hers. With an inward groan, I followed. "If Nora never marries, I never shall, that is certain," was my melancholy thought, as I succumbed to the inevitable, and meekly gave in my allegiance.

"Like a lamb to the sacrifice, eh, Bwandon?" said Sidney Phillips. Confound the fellow! he always appeared to see right into one's brain, and read one's thoughts like an open book.

"So we're all sworn celibates except Miss Wose," continued the mocking wretch.

"Come, Miss Wose, a'n't you weedy to wrenounce the slavery of wedlock?"

"I should hope not!" retorted Rose Ferrean with asperity. "I never saw such a set of lunatics in all my life! I must say I had a better opinion of you, Dick Brandon." Here I cast a pitiful look at Nora, and Rose seemed softened. She proceeded, "As for you, Nora, I do believe you'd go into a nunnery, or turn dervish and go spinning on your head, if your cousin asked you to!"

"Your illustrations may be a little shaky, but your spirit is wifewashing, Miss Wose," drawled Sidney.

"My name is not *Wose*! and if I was n't an idiot I would n't drag out my remarks as if every word weighed a ton!" angrily retorted Miss Ferrean, who was not very well endowed with the repose of the *Vere de Veres*. Rose was all energy herself, and vehemently despised all lazy people. Hence she could not bear Sidney.

"Won't you join the club then, Rose?" asked Edna Reese. "I'm sure it's a great deal nicer to be united in friendship than" —

"Fudge!" interrupted Rose. "I shall marry the first desirable man that asks me, and so will you, every one of you girls! Yes: Miss Chetwoode and all. Now mark my words!"

Miss Chetwoode drew herself up with stately *hauteur*, and gave Miss Rose a look that ought to have been annihilating; but, as it did not appear to have the slightest effect upon the irreverent damsel, she treated the imputation with silent contempt.

Nora looked quite distressed at seeing Rose's evident vexation; and as for Harry Blount, if ever speedy repentance was written upon a human face, it was plainly to be read in his lugubrious countenance when Rose declared her intention of marrying "the first desirable man that asked her." I fully expected to see him withdraw from the club on the spot; but he probably stood in awe of Blanche Chetwoode's wrath, — big, blundering fellow that he was, with a voice like a bass-drum, a fist like a sledge-hammer, and a heart like — well, like putty, or something as soft. Besides, poor Harry was dreadfully afraid of being laughed at, and Sidney Phillips was watching him with a Mephistophelean grin; so he stood his ground.

I believe it was with the sole idea of adding to the poor fellow's despondency that

Sidney Phillips brought out another proposal, which was certainly not at all to my distaste.

"It's understood we all agree to help each other keep this resolution, — aw — is n't it, Miss Chetwoode?"

"Certainly, Mr. Phillips."

"Then — aw — I propose we add an agreement that no member of this club shall accept or offer any attention to anybody not a member of this club except when politeness compels it."

This motion was carried with much acclaim, the only dissenting voice being that of Harry Blount; and, in the overwhelming majority against him, he was scarcely heard.

So our "Antimatrimonial Club" was formed, and we all fell to discussing our new principles with great spirit, and much unanimity of sentiment; indeed there was such a general acquiescence in everything that everybody said (except on the part of Rose Ferrean, who sat with her pretty nose and mouth screwed into what she probably considered an expression of great scorn, only opening her lips occasionally to remark "Fudge!" "Nonsense!" or something else equally brief and to the point) that the conversation shortly grew very tiresome, and Julian Ferrean relieved us all by proposing a walk down to the river. Everybody agreed, and we all paired off and started. Of course I walked with Nora, resolved to do the best I could to help her keep her pledge! Julian was just in advance of us, with Blanche Chetwoode; and I saw Sidney crook his arm to Belle Blount, and heard him whisper softly, —

"I presume, Miss Belle, as a Platonic friend, you will not refuse me the honor."

Belle did not refuse.

But poor Harry Blount! He went up to Rose Ferrean, and bowed, blushing to his eyebrows as he asked her to walk with him. There was a malicious sparkle in Rose's eyes as she sarcastically replied, —

"Pardon me, Mr. Blount, but you seem to forget that I am not a member of your club!"

Harry looked overwhelmed; and Rose's perpetual enemy remarked, —

"But the proviso, you recollect, Miss Wose: when politeness so evidently requires" —

"Thank you, sir!" retorted Rose, shortly. "I have no desire to impose upon Mr.

Blount's politeness. There is Roy Chetwoode, with his fishing-rod: I shall go fishing with him."

And she forthwith turned her back upon him, and walked down to the garden-gate, where Nora's eighteen-year-old brother stood arranging his fishing-tackle, preparing for a piscatory excursion. The boy looked up, blushing and flattered, as she preferred her request to be permitted to go with him; and shortly after they went off together, laughing so prodigiously that I guessed she was telling him all about our antimatrimonial club.

And sweet little Nora comforted poor Harry, but discomfited me, by calling him to her side, and saying, kindly and gayly, —

"You shall walk with me, Harry. I will have two cavaliers; and, if one is stupid, I can talk with the other."

She talked to us both impartially, but I am afraid she found neither of us very brilliant. Not wishing to favor me above him, I suppose, she managed to drop my arm, on some pretext of arranging her hat, which did not need arranging, and she did not replace her hand where I had been so pleased to have it rest. We walked along in a funereal manner, — Harry, gloomy and miserable; I, wishing him fifty miles away; and both of us inwardly regretting that we had taken that senseless pledge upon us. As for Nora, I've no idea what she thought, but it might well have been that we were both "stupid."

So we arrived at the river: an eccentric stream, born among the mountains, which took a rest here, after the labor of turning countless mill-wheels and propelling much machinery, and broadened into quite a lake. But a little further to the south it narrowed again; and, after running in tumultuous rapids down a long, steep, rocky slope for a mile or more, it plunged over a precipice of nearly an hundred feet in height, forming a cataract which was the sole scenic lion of our neighborhood. Taking advantage of the high fall and swift current, an enterprising manufacturer, whose mill was half a mile from the river, had cut a narrow canal from the rapids just above the falls to his mill below, whence, after furnishing the motive power for his wheel, it was conducted back to the river, mingling its soiled waters with the parent stream again below the cataract. I am thus particular in describing this useful sluice, because in that day's ter-

use. His experience it became so all-important to us.

"I wish," said Belle Blount, as we came to the river-side, "that we could take a sail: it would be delightful this warm day."

"Why can't we?" asked Annie Grierson. "There's a boat."

Of course everybody immediately clamored for a sail; and Julian Ferrean, Tom Revere, and myself were instituted a committee to "investigate" the boat, which lay rocking on the ripples just a little out from the shore. It proved to be a great, hulking affair, nearly as large as a whaler's boat, and half full of water. To add to its unpromising appearance, there was but one pair of oars, and these not of the strongest. Also the craft was quite destitute of any steering apparatus. However, all the ladies were eager for a sail, and we, in our gallantry, decided that these difficulties could be surmounted.

So we went manfully to work, all the masculines of the party except Phillips, who utterly declined to soil his white hands and wet his patent leathers, even in the service of Belle Blount. Harry indignantly declared that he should not accompany us unless he earned his passage; while Edna Reese curled her lip very perceptibly, and Annie Grierson murmured to Belle, in a contemptuous undertone, —

"Belle, dear, you ought to keep your cavalier in a glass case!"

Belle laughed good-humoredly, and ran her handsome, flashing eyes over the lounging figure and listless face of her escort, as she frankly exclaimed, —

"What a lazy fellow you are, Sidney Phillips!"

"Weally, I'm cwushed." And Sidney spread his handkerchief over a stone before he sat down upon it to contemplate our industry.

We dragged the boat ashore, turned it upside down to tip the water out, culled leaves and grass with which to cleanse it of the mud which had settled on the bottom; made a temporary dry floor by laying down a couple of long, stout boards which we found upon the shore; and finally summoned the ladies to come and witness the result. They were in raptures, and declared it to be "splendid."

Forthwith we all seated ourselves in the boat, bestowing ourselves as we chose; for, though there was a scarcity of seats, there

was plenty of room. Julian Ferrean and Blanche Chetwoode sat down in the bow, and it seemed perfectly proper that they should have the highest and driest seat; for certainly we all considered Julian a little superior to us other men, — perhaps because the ladies set him at so high a valuation; or perhaps because he so considered himself. And as for Miss Chetwoode, she seemed more like a goddess than a mortal girl, as she sat there at the head of the boat, her black dress and lace mantilla falling in most artistic drapery around her stately figure.

Belle Blount sat at the stern, and Sidney reclined on the dry boards at her feet; while the rest of the party sat upon those same lucky boards, except Harry and I, who took the oarsman's seat and the one pair of oars, — an oar apiece, — and we pushed out into the river.

How merry we were! How we sang and laughed, and grew witty as to jokes, and brilliant as to compliments! And Death, with his utmost horror, was almost spreading his dark wings over us every one! Why had we no foreboding of it? Why did none of those mysterious presentiments come to any of us such as people tell us they experience in hours of unconscious danger? For we were on the verge of deadly peril.

Growing tired at last of propelling this boat load of youth and beauty, I rested on my oar, and called to Tom Revere, —

"Come and take my place, Revere: you are a rowist, are you not?"

"Capital one," answered Tom, leaving Annie Grierson's side reluctantly but good-naturedly; and, giving Sidney Phillips a shove, he politely observed to that reclining individual, —

"Get up, Lazy Lawrence, and take Blount's oar. You're a complete dead-head."

"I — aw — don't wow," lazily returned Sidney.

"Come and learn then."

"Cahn't possibly. Pway excuse me, my deah fellah: this oppressive heat takes all the enawgy out of a fellah."

"As if you ever had a particle of energy in your composition, you incorrigible idler!" exclaimed Julian Ferrean, as he came forward to relieve Harry.

In rising to relinquish his oar, Harry inadvertently let it slip from his hold. He made a snatch to recover it, but it had

flouted beyond reach ere his fingers touched the water. Half a dozen hands were outstretched to grasp it, but it escaped them all, and sped away before us with such arrow-like swiftness that we were startled. None of us had noticed where we were, nor how fast we had been moving, until now; and, as the boat veered suddenly around, and began to glide stern-foremost after the fast-disappearing oar, Belle Blount gave utterance to the horror-stricken exclamation which was trembling upon every lip, —

“We are in the rapids!”

“And drifting toward the falls!” murmured Nora, turning pale.

“My God!” said Julian Ferrean, in a hoarse whisper, and sank back white and faint into the seat from which he had arisen.

Tom Revere clutched his oar in a Herculean effort to head the boat toward the nearest shore. Slowly the bow came half way around, wavered for a moment, — and then there was a cracking sound, and the frail oar snapped in twain! Tom fell backward among us, and the broken pieces of our last oar darted down the rapids!

A dead silence fell upon us all. We looked into each other's faces, and saw no hope. Every moment swept us nearer to the cataract, and the current rushed downward with such fearful velocity that no mortal man could swim ashore. It was an awful doom that stared us in the face. That was a time that tried our souls, and every one of us came out in true colors then.

Suddenly there was a crash, — a shock and jar that threw us all from our places, and nearly overturned the boat. We were among the rocks; and as we struck the boat was held fast for a little space upon the hidden crag. Then were our hearts laid bare, our secrets revealed, and every man turned, with love's forgetfulness of self, to the woman he loved best, — all save one. Nora threw herself into my arms, and I clasped her to my heart; Tom Revere threw his arm about the waist of Annie Grierson; and Eustace Hardy knelt supporting the trembling form of Edna Reese. Harry Blount and his sister clasped hands, and calmly waited; and when Sidney Phillips bent over Belle, and spoke a quick request, she lifted her pale lips and kissed him in silence, with that look of resignation which was fast settling upon all our faces — save one.

I thought I understood human nature,

but I should never have taken Julian Ferrean for a coward. He was not a braggart, but there was an air about him which made one think he could be very brave, given the occasion; and now — not a girl screamed when we struck, but Julian Ferrean shrieked aloud and fell down in the boat, cowering in abject terror at the feet of Blanche Chetwoode.

They say that women love bravery in a man above all other qualities; but perhaps there was so much of the masculine in Blanche Chetwoode's nature that she could dispense with a superabundance of manly spirit in the man she loved. I thought then, and think still, that she and Julian ought to have changed sexes, for she was the better man of the two. She seemed to feel no contempt for his more than womanish weakness. I believe it appeared to her as natural and excusable as Edna Reese's terror seemed to the lover who held her in his arms. She bent over the fellow as he groveled, moaning and whimpering, before her, and spoke to him in tender, pitiful accents, as if he had been a frightened child, —

“Julian do not give way in this manner. Look up, Julian, and try to think of the other world where we shall soon be all together.”

“O Heaven, have mercy!” was all he answered; and he shrunk closer down nearer and nearer to her.

The boat began to grate and creak: another instant and we looked to see it part, and launch us into the torrent. Men clasped their loved ones closer, and women murmured low-toned prayers; but Julian threw up his hands with a cry, and clung to Blanche Chetwoode's garments.

“Blanche! Blanche! my darling! take hold of me! If I must die, let me die in your arms, for I love you!” he cried, in an agony of fright, to this woman whom he had known but a day. And I believe he fell in love with her in that very hour of trial for her strength and calmness. Yes, I believe it was then and there that they loved, each drawn to the other by those qualities that were lacking in themselves.

She drew his head upon her bosom, and tried to quiet his moaning; and I, who saw it all, despised him less for being almost dignified by the love of a woman so far his superior.

It is taking me a long time to tell of it, but we hung upon that rock perhaps not

more than two minutes. When the boat began to sway and creak, we thought that surely she was going to pieces; but it was not so. For a few seconds she strained and shivered like a living thing, and then the rushing water swept her off, and we darted onward toward the cataract.

At that moment, when hope seemed an idle thought, rose up our preserver, the hero of the occasion, — no other than Sidney Phillips!

"By Jove!"

He started up with a shout that made us all jump, and with a suddenness that half capized the boat, and seized hold of one of the long, wide boards which had been laid over the bottom of the boat.

"Let me have this board! quick!" he shouted, pulling at it frantically; and we all scrambled off with uncomprehending obedience.

In breaking away from the rock the boat had been whirled about, and was drifting now with her bow ahead; but already she was beginning to swing around again, when Sidney Phillips took the stout board and plunged it into the water at the stern, resting it in a deep notch which once had held the tiller. Tugging with all his might at his improvised rudder, he succeeded in turning the boat's head down the stream again.

But the pulling up of that board had disclosed a new fact. I do not say a new peril, for when death is certain, as it then seemed to us all, nothing can add to the awful conviction. In breaking away from the rock the boat had sprung a leak, and the water was pouring in through the parted joint. We saw it, but never gave a thought to it until Sidney cried, —

"By Jove! we've sprung a leak! Bwandon! Ferwean! There's two dippers in the cuddy. Take 'em and go to bailing, or she will sink!"

It is strange to me now with what unquestioning alacrity I sprang to obey what seemed so useless a command. If we were to die, why not as well drown here as under the cataract? But I thought of nothing save prompt obedience. There and then Sidney Phillips was my master. I felt that, and obeyed him.

"Ferwean!" he shouted again. "Quick, I say! Quick! What is the mattah with Ferwean?"

For the first time he noticed Ferreau's

condition, and he uttered that exclamation in a tone of pure astonishment.

"Don't waste words on him: he's idiotic with fright. I've seen fellows in that condition in the army," said Tom Revere, as he possessed himself of the remaining dipper and commenced to bail.

Sidney gave one look of blank wonder at the groveling figure of Julian: such cowardice was evidently beyond his comprehension. Then, still straining at the long sweep with which he kept us headed aright, he turned to the rest of us, and, with a look in his face that was a revelation to us all, he said, —

"We have yet one chance for life!"

Nobody uttered a word, but all eyes were fixed on him.

"You all know Bwown's mill-flume above the falls?" he said.

We all knew of it, — the sluice of which I have spoken that carried water-power to the factory.

"This current will carwy us within ten feet of it," Sidney continued, in the same steady tones. "The watah runs through the flume as swift as these wapids. There must be a stwong eddy at its mouth; and, if we can head the bow that way, we may be dwawn into the flume. It is narrow, and we can catch hold of the twees, and save ourselves. I'm going to twy it."

Heaven! how sweet life became in that moment! How our hearts leaped with the quick impulse of returning hope!

"Now, then, you fellahs, bail for deah life!" said our commander, tugging at his sweep, as the fierce current threatened to shift the boat, in spite of his utmost efforts. "Only keep us afloat, and we may be saved. If we pass that flume, though, we're bound to go ovaah the catawact."

In the midst of our deadly peril, I recollect how I almost smiled at the ghastly ludicrousness of Sidney Phillips's foppish lisp. It was not a natural defect, but had been so long a studied affectation that it had become second nature, and clung to him now in this hour of his supreme heroism.

But, in other respects, who could have known Sidney Phillips? All the lazy, drawling languor of an hour ago had vanished. He stood there, master of the situation, with his white face and firm-set lips, with gray eyes blazing, and dilated nostrils, holding the rudder with a grip that made the cords stand out like ropes upon his slim, white

hands. The task he had undertaken was evidently too much for his strength, and he called to Harry Blount, —

"Harwy, come and help me hold this wuddah: I can't stand this confounded stwain."

In an instant Harry was beside him, and Sidney said, in tones that cut the air, they were so keen and clear, —

"Catch hold there: that 's it. We are getting neah the falls. Hold on now like gwim death."

We were shooting forward with fearful swiftness. Ahead of us we saw the tossing waters and white mist of the cataract. Its thunder filled our ears, and hushed our very heart-beats. Suddenly we saw the narrow opening in the bank which was our only hope. Into it rushed a current of water in a swift, smooth green slope that made us dizzy to look upon.

"Now, Harwy!" spoke Sidney, in a quick, hoarse whisper. "Head her for the flume! Now!"

One mighty effort. Two strong men working for life and love against that surging torrent! The boat wavered for an instant, and then wheeled around and slid down that long, smooth slope, without a shake or tremor, and shot swiftly into the flume.

A sickening faintness came over me then, such as I never felt before nor since. It lasted but an instant, and I fell to bailing vigorously. Belle Blount struck her hands together, with a sharp "Ah!" Nora burst into tears; and Julian Ferrean started up as we rushed under the bending branches of a tree, and made a spring to catch them.

"Sit down, you idiot, or I 'll brain you!" thundered Sidney, with menacing eyes. "Do you want to ddown us now?"

Julian shrank down in silence, fearing the wrath of that man more than he feared death.

On we swept. The narrow banks were so close on either hand that we could almost touch them; but we dared not arrest the boat while it moved at such a rate of velocity.

The current slackened at last, and we began to move less rapidly. Sidney had left Harry to hold the rudder alone; and, coming carefully forward, he took a coil of rope from the cuddy, and began to fasten it firmly to an iron ring in the bow. Then he stood up, and looked ahead. In advance of

us, a great tree threw its branches quite across the canal, and they bent so low as to touch the water.

"Catch hold of those bwanches with one hand, and hang on to the boat with the othah, all of you," he said, in a clear, distinct voice.

We all obeyed. As we swept in among the wet branches, we clung to them, and to the boat also; but Sidney, with the rope in his hand, leaped ashore. He fastened the rope to a stout sapling; and in three minutes we were all standing, safe at last, on *terra firma*.

As Sidney took Belle Blount from her brother's arms, and lifted her up the bank, he strained her to his heart in a long, passionate embrace, and the tears poured down his cheeks like rain.

"Belle! Belle!" he uttered, in choking sobs.

"Sidney!" she answered softly, with her head on his breast.

And then the storm of emotion was over, and he released her from his clasping arms. And, as we all stood there, he uncovered his head, and bowed it, saying, in tones of the deepest reverence, —

"God be thanked!"

With bare, bent heads, we all responded to that prayer of thanks, — the most heartfelt prayer I ever listened to.

We stood in silence for a moment. Then Sidney turned, and held out his hand to Belle. She placed her own within it, and without a word we followed them as they led the way to the road that was near at hand.

We walked back to Chetwoode Hall in perfect silence. There was no necessity for speech, and nobody spoke.

As we entered at the gate, Rose Terrean and Roy came forward to meet us; but the saucy smile died out of Rose's face, and the boyish mischief fled from Roy's, as they noted our sober faces, and wet, disheveled appearance.

"Why, what on earth has happened to you?" cried Rose. "How did you all get so wet?"

"Did you — aw — catch any fish, Miss Wose?" and Sidney Phillips was himself again.

The explanations and the sensation that followed our arrival in such a state shall be "skipped," as also all the rest of that eventful day, until the time arrived, when, re-

freshed by "tea," and somewhat reconstructed as to dress, and revived as to spirits, we assembled in the parlor to make our adieux. Then it was that Sidney Phillips spoke.

"Does anybody wemembah anything about an antimatwimonial awangement that was contwived heah a few houahs ago?"

That was a crusher. Everybody looked at his neighbor in blank confusion. The gentlemen finally began to laugh, and the ladies to blush, and the indomitable Sidney continued:—

"Allow me to make a statement and a pwoposition. — Belle, my angel, don't run off. — You undahstand, ladies and gentlemen, that Belle and her and your humble servant are anxious to entah into that — aw — pwoscribed state of matwimony," —

Here Belle blushed to the roots of her hair, and said hastily, —

"Sidney Phillips!"

But he laughed, and proceeded, with great gravity, —

"And, to the best of my observation, all the othah membahs of this club are in the same pwedicament. Now I move that our antimatwimonial club be mutually dissolved."

"Second the motion," cried I, squeezing Nora Chetwoode's hand.

Nobody objected, and "our antimatrimonial club" was accordingly dissolved on the spot, by mutual consent, after enjoying a turbulent existence of about five hours' duration.

Since then, several marriages have taken place among its members, the first of which

was that of Julian Ferreen and Blanche Chetwoode. He followed her home to the city, and married her there; and there he remained. We do not miss him from our set; for none of us forget what a poltroon he showed himself in that trying hour which held us all up in our true colors, and our former admiration for him is altered to contempt.

Sidney Phillips is our "lion" now. We no longer despise him for his laziness, and we rather admire his foppish ways and his super-extra neatness of apparel. Whenever a leader is wanted in any undertaking, be it for pleasure or profit, and anybody is superfluous enough to ask who shall fill the position, the rest of us answer with one voice, — Harry Blount's usually, —

"Phillips, of course."

Sidney married Belle Blount, and I am going to marry little Nora.

As for Rose Ferreen, there has been no engagement announced, to be sure; but after our league was dissolved, that night, I saw her standing on the veranda, while Harry wrapped her shawl about her, preparatory to accompanying her home, and I heard him say, —

"Rose, I think you took a very sensible view of the marriage question this morning. Tell me, darling, do you consider me at all desirable?"

"Oh, don't be silly!" was the reply of Rose.

But I fancy she did not think him very foolish, judging from the fact that she offered no remonstrance against the next proceeding, the nature of which I will not particularize.

OUR BOARDER.--A NEW YEAR'S STORY.

BY HENRI ELLIOTT.

Now we wished to improve our monetary circumstances, which was certainly a very natural desire; so that after we had considered in a careful and attentive manner the many means employed to accomplish this all-important end, we concluded to take a boarder; and then, as a matter of course, a female boarder—they are so much the most interesting.

Not long after we made our intent known we secured a boarder. Our boarder was a young lady from some rural village, of the quilting-party style, where the parson and the schoolmaster were the pride of the elite society, which moved along as smoothly and quietly as the ripples on the crystalline founts of fable, seldom if ever thrown out of its tracks by any unseemly scandal; and gossiping had died out from sheer want of something to gossip over; the children were brought up in the way that they should go in, and staid in it. Such was our boarder's home; but she, with a woman's aspiration, was not content; she craved the education offered by the city seminaries.

She came on the day the school opened, in the fall, and was very attentive to her studies all through the term.

Our boarder said that she did not think it was well for a young lady in the city to go out visiting much, or running about the town; we told our boarder that we thought the same, so she never went abroad.

On several occasions our boarder informed us that she had a purpose in coming to the city for her education, and wanted us to be very inquisitive; but we would not be—we never asked a single question—we don't think it is right to pry into other people's (particularly boarders) business.

When, in a very natural course of events, the Christmas holidays came around, we asked our boarder if she did not expect to go home to spend them; our boarder replied no, but that she had a purpose for staying in the city (?). We were becoming very curious about this purpose, but we stood by our morals, and contented ourselves with the remark that it was common for pupils to spend the holidays at home, and that we, of course, would have to

charge extra for this week. Our boarder remonstrated, and said that she was boarding by the month; to which we responded yes, by the month of four weeks. Our boarder consented to pay extra, but remarked that she had a purpose in view (?), and always tried to be economical, and save pa when she could.

We said economy was a good principle, and as to saving pa—O, would all girls were half so thoughtful!

Then came New Year, and with it New Year's callers.

We did not think to tell our boarder about it; for we thought it would concern neither her nor her purpose. But young men are quick to find out about pretty girls, and our boarder was a pretty girl! So the very first call made was intended for her.

Our boarder was carrying a pitcher of water up the front stairs. Now, we made a rule when we first concluded to take a boarder, that our boarders must wait upon themselves, and not carry provisions up the front stairs. Well, as I said, our boarder was carrying her pitcher up the front stairs, when she heard a rap at the front door. She set down her pitcher and opened the door.

A young gentleman bowed, and asked, though he knew very well to whom he spoke, if Miss Smith was in; for that was her name, though we always called her simply "the boarder."

"I am she," responded our boarder. (She was studying grammar.)

The beau was a bashful youth. Our boarder was not a bit bashful, so when he poked out a piece of paper to her, as she told us, with something on it, she said, rather pertly:

"I don't want to buy anything to-day."

The youth turned very red, and stammered out:

"I am not a peddler. I only come to see—if—if—if you—"

"No, I won't subscribe, either," said our boarder, who was not to be taken in by any peddler's devices. "Not because your article may not be very nice; but then, it is against my purpose."

"Purpose—"

"I always have a purpose in view." (?) Here she lowered her voice confidentially, so that the man would ask what that purpose was. But he did not; he only said, apologetically:

"I meant to ask if you received callers to-day."

When our boarder, exasperated at having her purpose so slighted, said:

"I don't see what business of yours that is—but—"

The youth retired; and our boarder, muttering to herself, "Though if any gentleman of the city, having been struck with my appearance so soon, should make me a call, of course I would receive him!" shut the door with a bang.

In about an hour our boarder again answered the bell. This time it was two gentlemen instead of one. They both doffed their hats and said, "Happy New Year!"

"Merry New Year!" responded our boarder, good-naturedly, not to be outdone in good wishes.

It was a freezing cold day, and the wind whistled through their frozen mustaches, as they stood on the exposed steps; for our boarder still stood in the half-open door, with an elbow on either side—in anything but an inviting attitude.

"Miss Smith, I presume," said one of the men.

"That is my name," answered our boarder.

Then they handed her their cards.

"There was one on this street with the same thing to-day," said our boarder, not taking the cards, "but I would not sign it; for, as I told him this very morning, I am staying in town for a purpose. (?) Besides, I always try to be economical, and save pa when I can!"

One of the gentlemen laughed, and nudging the other under the arm, said:

"It is a very cold day, Miss Smith."

"O very indeed!" said she, drawing her shawl around her shoulders, and shutting the door somewhat tighter. Then in a lower tone, "You would not have thought it, but the water froze solid in my pitcher last night."

"No, we would not have thought it!" said they both in a breath. "Good-morning, Miss Smith."

"Good-by," answered our boarder, slamming the door.

Then our boarder came and told us how strange for three such well-dressed young men to be taking up a subscription for the same thing in one day.

We told her that they were New Year's callers—that it was the custom.

She said that she had never heard of the like; so then we told her that she must not go to the door herself, but must dress up and sit in the parlor, and when one came receive him at the parlor door, and sit by and entertain him pleasantly, and when he started to go ask him to call often during the next year.

Our boarder went up stairs, and after having arranged her toilet in a manner to suit her taste, and in a way which, I am sure, would have suited the Queen of the Cannibal Isles, as regards to donning all one's trunk at a time, she took a seat in the parlor right opposite the door, and began her watch.

After a while our parson came in, to take a New Year's dinner with us. The boarder met him at the parlor door with a smiling face, took both of his hands in hers, and shook them pleasedly indeed! and then drew him onto the sofa, giving him no time to remonstrate, and there besieged him to come often during the coming year.

"Now won't you?" said our boarder. "O do!" She bent over him, looking down in his face in a most pathetic manner. "Now come!"

The good parson, who had all this time been astounded out of his wits, now made a desperate dash for the door, and vanished. He had never seen the boarder before, and besides was married. Westood awe-stricken.

Our boarder moaned out, "All in vain! When I thought I would treat him so kindly, to think the ungrateful creature rebuffed all my kind advances thus! Alas! alas! my poor dear purpose—to marry a city gentleman—for I was so tired of the country—all in vain!"

We read our boarder a plain English lecture. Our boarder left; so now the place is open. But this time we desire a male boarder—the ladies always have marrying on the brain; and though it does not always happen that their purpose is exposed, still they have it all the same. Now our boarder did not get married, yet many another boarder who came to town with the same purpose in heart, though to all appearances to go to school, has succeeded.

OUR EXODUS.

BY CORA CHESTER.

"'Tomorrow to fresh fields and pastures new.'"

Geoff read it aloud, and then looked across the breakfast-table inquiringly.

I gazed abstractedly into the coffee-pot. I have learned, after two years of married life, never to express an opinion on any subject.

Geoff is a good man, has all the cardinal virtues; but he is an extremely aggravating one, and generally waits for others to start projects, coming nobly to the front to share the glory, if there be any, but retiring gracefully at the first suggestion of a failure.

Geoff continued reading his well-worn copy of Milton, *he is a one-idea-ed man* and strongly attached to a few favorite authors, and then repeated slowly, —

"'Tomorrow to fresh fields and pastures new.' How is it, Jenny, is n't this weather confoundedly hot?"

He is rarely profane, but I suppose men must be allowed some license during the dog-days, so I merely elevated my eyebrows and came out of my day-dreams with apparently great effort.

"What were you saying, Geoff?"

"That I can't stand this sort of thing much longer. Baking streets, sour milk, mosquitos and the seven plagues of Egypt! Pack your trunks, Jen, and it will be 'fresh fields and pastures new' with a vengeance!"

"But you don't mean it literally, dear?" I gasped. "I can't go tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow or not at all," responded my agreeable lord and master, as he left the room.

"I mean to ask Bethel to go," I called out after his retreating figure.

He turned back and actually winked at me. I have tried in vain to talk him out of the vulgar habit.

"I suppose that Smyth *might* be induced to join us."

Now Smyth was my *bete noir*. Geoff and he had kept up a sort of *Dæmon* and *Pythias* affair since my wedding-day, until his very name caused me a fit of the blues. He is a Mark Tapley sort of fellow, and, I

need hardly add, an aggravating companion to take along upon picnics or excursions of pleasure.

"O Geoff!" I cried, actually roused now from my feigned indifference. "You know that Bethel and he are hardly upon speaking terms, and besides," with a last effort to throw off this old man of the sea who had clung so closely about our married life, "Mr. Smyth hates Saratoga and the seashore."

"Then we'll vary the programme. Say Richfield Springs and Cooperstown. Beautiful scenery; points of interest for you and Beth to write up. We lower animals devour it all for ourselves while you use your eyes and ears to give others pleasure."

This bit of flattery and a kiss completed the business. Geoff had his way, as he generally does, and to show this remarkable power of this man I have only to add that the next morning found Beth Lonsdale, Mr. Smyth, Geoff and myself cozily settled in a compartment of the car and spinning along post-haste through the green fields and picturesque woodlands of central New York.

Richfield Springs proved only a temporary rest for our easily satisfied feminine minds. Masculine discontent entered our paradise upon the third morning.

Geoff and his odious friend passed and repassed our chairs with their mouths full of cigars, then Geoff, as spokesman, advanced.

"Jenny, what do you say to packing up? Smyth is tired of all this flummydiddle and dress; wants something more rural. We will away toward Cooperstown tomorrow."

I have always prided myself upon my amiability and sweetness of disposition, but if the just indignation of a long-suffering woman could have annihilated the tyrant Smyth, at that moment smiling blandly at our vexed faces, he would have troubled our peace no longer.

I say *our* vexed faces, but looking up I was surprised to see a pleased smile awakening the dimples in Beth's pink cheeks.

"The haunts of Leatherstocking!" ex-

claimed she, with a sentimental sigh of ecstasy. "I have so longed to visit the home of Fennimore Cooper! Let's go and pack at once, Jenny. I am sick to death of this dancing and dressing three times a day."

I stood aghast. Beth going over to the enemy? Beth who had prided herself on her superb toilets, exquisite waltzing, and quiet flirtations during the dull morning hours spent on the piazza and promenades!

"But, Beth," I whispered tragically, "your hair will be out of crimp all the time, and we will have to traipse all over the country with these men, and you know," with a sweet, womanly smile, "that you look like a fright without crimps, dear."

"Oh, don't worry about me, darling. I have a set of *frizettes*. I warn you all that even Cooperstown and its picturesque surroundings will not satisfy me long. It is *triste*. Has been written up so many times. I shall, 'over the hills and far away,' even if I go alone."

"Swift to be hurled
Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world."

quoted I. "Well, if you will humor these horrid tyrants, you force me to become a fellow-victim. I warn you that they are without mercy. Your aches and ills will count for nothing. It will be tramp, tramp, tramp, until you will wish you had never been born."

The headstrong girl only laughed and ran up-stairs at Geoff's suggestion, to commence the packing-up process. I meekly followed, and the next day found us again on the road.

The gentlemen, or rather Smyth (Geoff was a mere cipher), soon wearied of the classic shades of Cooperstown.

"I say, Geoff," he puffed out one morning, just as we began to feel at home in our new quarters, "it's deused dull here. Let's leave the women-folks for a few days and be off on a tour of inspection."

I feel sure whenever men propose leaving the "women-folks at home" that mischief is a-brewing. Smyth's face looked innocent enough, in fact he affects at times a sort of Skimpole childishness, for certain purposes of his own, but its assumption at this time did n't blind me. In my wifely anxiety I could hear the popping of champagne corks and the sounds of midnight orgies.

"Perhaps, Mr. Smyth," I ventured, with

a mild attempt at satire, "it might be as well for my husband to consult the *women-folks* before making any plans for them. They may object to being treated so cavalierly."

He turned with a broad grin to Beth.

"Well, Miss Lonsdale, do you object to being left here?"

"Most decidedly, sir. It is unfair and disagreeable of you men to adopt the popular prejudice that women are formed for inaction. I came in search of adventure, and wherever you go I shall go."

"When do you propose starting, Geoff, and how are we to travel?" asked I, in my new role of patient Griselda.

"We might as well start at once, and we go in a farmer's wagon."

"Oh," said Beth, just a little discouraged, "and how long will we stay?"

"We won't stay anywhere," growled Smyth. "We mean to travel."

"All right," said Beth, "we can stand it if you can. Come on, Jenny, and pack our Saratogas."

"Can't take any trunks," snapped Smyth.

Beth stopped short with a beseeching little smile on her face. If he had n't been a brute that smile would have melted him.

"O dear Mr. Smyth, you can't be so cruel. A woman's identity is locked up in her trunk. Her toilets are herself!"

"We will leave the trunks, by all means, if that is the case," retorted he. "No room for anything but lunch-baskets and fishing-tackle."

Beth's blue eyes grew defiant.

"Very well. We will manage with bundles then."

In spite of my better judgment she made me do up two ridiculous bundles and clothe myself in an absurd blue flannel suit.

She looked as nearly ugly as I had ever seen her with her large straw hat and blouse waist.

We climbed into the wagon, settled ourselves upon the hard seat, and rattled off.

I will admit, that at first, in the dewy freshness of the morning, it was pleasant. I caught myself humming bits from the "Bohemian Girl," and felt pleasantly vagabondish. If it had n't been that Smyth's shadow enveloped me I should have been happy.

He, as usual, dampened my ardor. If I admired a scene he immediately sang its

praises so long and loud that I stopped in sheer disgust.

Beth's elasticity that day was something remarkable. She literally would n't stay snubbed.

We had traveled since early morning at rather a slow pace, and even Smyth's demoniac high spirits seemed to lag as the warm day drew to its close. We had come across rather a hilly country, and now, as our horses paused to rest, the sun began to sink behind the distant hills in a sea of glory, crimsoning the tree-tops, lighting up Beth's beautiful eyes, and even imparting a sort of solemnity to Smyth's rugged features as he sat, gazing, not at the sunset, but at Beth, with a something—a sort of pathos—in his brown eyes I had never seen there before. I noted, for the first time, that his eyes were really not so bad, and I had never been so near tolerating him.

"Phaeton is driving his horses with a vengeance this evening," said my poetical husband. "He has already fired the world!"

"More than you will ever do, my boy," put in his friend with a loud laugh. "Don't try, Geoff, for you will never amount to a row of pins, never!"

Geoff actually smiled. If I am his wife I will admit that his temper is sometimes sublime.

"I don't know," said Beth, turning around, with the glory still on her golden hair and pink cheeks, "that being famous, making a stir in the world, denotes that one must possess genius. You know that 'the youth who fired the Ephesian dome outlived in fame the pious fool who reared it!'"

"Which means that, even without the 'divine gift,' I can gain celebrity by merely robbing a hen-coop or stealing a horse! Thank you Miss Beth," said my husband.

Beth tried to explain, but we none of us heard what she said, as our driver whipped up his horses and in a few moments we had rattled into the Rip Van Winkle little town of Morris.

There it stood, with its broad streets and pleasant houses, peacefully asleep in the rosy lights. Nestled in this lovely spot away from the bustle of that invader steam, it looked to we weary wanderers a very picture of content. Geoff proposed a rest, but Smyth said,—

"No civilization this trip, my boy. Country hotels are abominable. Stuffy

rooms, greasy breakfasts, lumpy beds! no: 'a farmer's life is the life for me!' Let us drive through and look for a refuge beyond."

To hear was to obey; so on we went over a beautiful country where a picturesque creek began to twist and ripple through the fresh fields, shining like a broad silver ribbon in the green grass.

"How few people know of the beauty of this country," said Smyth, waving his hand toward the fair prospect. "In none of my European trips have I seen that bit of landscape surpassed."

Like most people Smyth was fond of alluding to his European travels.

"That 'ere creek twists one hundred and twenty-two times in its course," said our Jehu.

It was the first bit of information he had volunteered, but further acquaintance with him was nipped in the bud as Smyth gave a cry of "Halt!" and we paused in front of a small white farm-house where a supper and a night's rest were proposed.

After a short parley with a sharp-featured woman, the doors were thrown open to us, and Beth and I gladly crept into the high, old-fashioned feather beds. We were thoroughly tired out, and I think one fact worth recording: Beth actually forgot to do up her crimps that night!

The next morning we awoke to find that our protectors had left us for the day—a fishing-party was their excuse, I believe,—so we prepared for a morning excursion of our own.

Closing the gate behind us, Beth walked on a few steps, and then called to me,—

"Come here, Jenny: a grave beside the road. How strange!"

A modest monument stood directly in front of us, old and time-worn we could see. The date and quaint epitaph were inscribed upon it.

"'Sacred to the memory of Miss Hannah Cooper,'" read Beth. "Look at this, Jenny:—

"'On the 10th day of Septemr 1800
She was instantly translated from this
World.'"

"Read on," said I. "I can hardly make it out."

"'Passenger Stop:
And for a moment reflect

That neither accomplishments of
 Person,
 Nor great improvements of mind,
 Nor yet greater goodness of heart,
 Can arrest the hand of Death.
 To departed worth and excellence
 This monument is erected;
 This tribute of affection is inscribed
 By a friend this 1st day of January
 1801."

On the other side of the monument was
 written, —

"For thee, sweet maid:
 Resplendent beams of thought,
 Wisdom's rich lore,
 By Seraph hands were given;
 Thy spotless soul —
 The pure effulgence caught,
 It sparkled — was exhaled —
 And went to Heaven.

"Thy native worth —
 With diamond pen enrolled
 Beyond this sculptured
 Monument shall live,
 And charity —
 Of fair ethereal mould,
 A lasting tribute
 To thy memory give."

"I feel sure, Jenny," said Beth, "that it
 is a romance, a poor little heart story.
 Somebody's darling is lying here who
 doubtless was a belle and a beauty nearly
 one hundred years ago. Let us unravel the
 mystery, if there be any."

Nothing loath I followed her back into
 the kitchen where the hostess was busy
 churning butter. Her face was very red,
 and she jerked out her replies rather crossly.

"Did she know about that 'ere stone?
 Of course she did. It was n't no grave,
 only a monymnt to tell how a gal was
 thrown from her horse ever so many years
 ago. She had n't never read the monymnt,
 but doubtless that would tell us all about
 it."

I drew Beth's arm through, my own and
 said we would walk on in quest of further
 information.

We wandered a good half-hour, when
 Beth was the first to discover threatening
 clouds overhead. They had come up sud-
 denly from the west, and I saw that we
 were in for a wetting.

As the first drops came down, we quick-
 ened our fast walk into a run, and just in
 time we reached the gate of a large house

as the storm was about to break in all its
 fury.

Of course shelter was asked and obtained.
 Beth and I ran in the old-fashioned side en-
 trance of the house and gladly took chairs
 before the kitchen fire. A good-natured
 old country-woman attended to our wants,
 and then Beth, full of one subject, made
 inquiries as to the monument we had passed.

"Do I know about it?" gasped the old
 lady. "And who should know as well as me?
 My grandfather lifted the pretty young
 thing on her horse that day, and he often
 told how she had a sort of foreboding that
 something was a going to befall her, for she
 turned her horse about and hurried as she
 was to go to the grand doin's, jumped off
 and went back into her room to read some
 verses in her Bible. That's true as can be,
 miss. She was that pious that she read
 those sacred words afore she started again
 for this very house. This is the old Morris
 Manor, ladies, and that 'ere gal was carried
 dead, right over the very doorsteps you
 come over. My grandfather telled of the
 old general" —

"Oh, do please commence at the begin-
 ning," pleaded Beth.

So we drew our chairs a little closer to
 the old lady, and, but for Beth's nervous
 starts at the quick flashes of lightning, and
 the solemn roar of the thunder, every now
 and then drowning her voice, her story was
 uninterrupted.

"Well, I suppose you two is strangers
 about these parts, and the hull thing a'n't
 known to you as it be to the folks for miles
 around. I've heerd gran'ther talk, bless-
 ings on his memory, so many times of the
 grand doin's here, nigh a hundred years
 ago, that sometimes I see myself flying
 around, all powdered and bewigged, with
 the gentlefolks, until I feel unnatural like,
 and asleep, in these plain days.

"The Morris'es is an old family, my dears.
 'Way back to the days of Cromwell one of
 'em come over to this country to escape per-
 secution, they do say; and they made him
 or his son — I do forget which — Governor
 of New Jersey: years afore the Revolution,
 that was. Then come Lewis Morris, — one
 of the signers, they call him, though what
 for I don't know; but it must have been
 something great, for the family is mighty
 proud of his name. There's an old letter
 in the front room, from him to the general,
 if you 'd care to see it."

After course we declared our delight at her kindness; and, as the family were absent, and this housekeeper seemed to have things her own way, we gladly followed her through the broad halls into the dark, wide rooms telling so delightfully of age and mystery.

After considerable search she brought us the old letter, dated 1707, and traced by the time-honored hand of one long since gone to rest,—one who would never again wield pen or pencil, but who had left his name, a glorious inheritance, to his posterity. He had enrolled it with those immortal few who threw off the chains of tyranny, and gave home, liberty, and happiness, to grateful thousands.

The letter was addressed to his son, General Jacob Morris, and was written in a quaint, somewhat cramped hand. First came numerous bits of family news,—fears that his grandsons would not have the full benefits of early education, and bits of information to the general of his daughter, Sally, then on a visit to her grandfather.

Evidently young ladies of rank were differently taught in those days. What would the young misses of today say to such a training as this:—

"Sally is much improved. Her Aunt and Uncle Valentine take great pains with her. She writes and reads every day, and her aunt takes care that she sews: in short, she could not have better tutors."

Then Beth pointed out to me a sentence that, viewed in the light of later events, seemed almost a prophecy.

"This will be handed you by Colonel Burr, his Talents will give him great power in the Assembly, he can do a great deal of good or harm just as the fit takes him. Your house may be able to make a stand against his intrigues."

A fascinating, dangerous, unscrupulous man, even at that early day! A man just entering upon his new career, and yet already a source of fear to those older politicians. What his power in that assembly was, only faintly foreshadowed in this old letter, history has since revealed to us.

Laying the letter down, we went carefully around the old room, examining the contents of closets and tables.

Here was a quaint bit of china, presented to one of the ladies of the family by that ideally lovely woman, Theodosia Burr, the angelic daughter of an anything but angelic

man. A fine old christening-bowl, of antique workmanship that would have moved the heart of a connoisseur to envy. Two hundred years this bit of china had served in the family, and beside it were antique little tea-sets of exquisite make, whole dinner-sets of old India ware, and, in one corner, a dark, spindle-legged table upon which the boy who "never told a lie" had actually played cards! I wondered, as I looked, if his stern face had ever relaxed over an exciting game of poker; or is that game a later invention of the Evil One?

Beth was most pleased with the old pictures hanging about the rooms,—some of them portraits of dead-and-gone belles of the long ago,—ladies with high combs, long waists, and placid, sweet-looking faces. Evidently they did n't spoil their good looks trying to solve the vexed question of woman's mission, *a la* Mrs. Jellyby, as we do in our day. Courtly, powdered gentlemen, in immaculate, ruffled shirts, and faultless queues, looked at us with the same mild, blue eyes. Life could n't have proved the fitful fever to these people that it does to Geoff and me. Fancy one of us dressing up, and sitting hour after hour to have a portrait taken! Why, we grudge ten minutes at the photographer's in these enlightened days.

"The graveyard is just beyond here," said our old lady, going to one of the windows, and pointing down the wet road. "There is where the old general is buried."

"Oh! that reminds me of that other grave beside the road," said Beth.

"It be n't a grave, miss," corrected the old housekeeper, "only a moniment as tells of a grave. It was in the old general's time, too. He come into these parts with Judge Cooper and Judge Upton, when it was all a howling wilderness, and I heerd as they had had to mark the trees to find their way out of the forest. Men had grit in them days, and they settled here. Judge Cooper founded Cooperstown, Judge Upton Mt. Upton, a pleasant place, four miles beyond the village below here, and General Morris, he built this old house, the part we 're in now, nigh one hundred years ago."

It had stopped raining, and, as the sun was drying the grass nicely, Beth proposed a stroll to the chapel and graveyard,—at the same time insisting upon the continuance of the old lady's story as we strolled along.

"Well, miss, as I've often heard mother tell it, I will give it in her words. She was a-staying in this very house as help, kinder lookin' after the niggers, you know; for the ginerel he kep' slaves in them days, and a lazy, shif'less lot they was, and my mother she had her heart and hands full that day, what with the company and the cooking, for there was to be a grand dinner party, and the old ginerel was a mighty partickler man, a-wantin' everything up to time, company and all. Well, this Miss-Cooper was as pretty a young thing as there was in these parts, and they all sot a sight of store by her, but the dinner was on, and the company waiting, and she did n't come. The ginerel he would n't set down, and it got later and later; but still she did n't come, and finally nothin' for to do but the ginerel must go to the door, when up come a horse a-galloping like mad, his eyes a-sticking out of his head, and when the servants rushed out to meet the guest there was nothing but a empty saddle a-twisted and turned on his back.

"The ginerel he run down to the road, a-lookin' to the right and the left, yet dreading to find what he was a-lookin' for, and there, jest on the spot where the monymment stands, lay the young thing, all in the dust, and stark dead.

"Over that 'ere very threshold you two come over this morning, the ginerel brought her in his arms, her long curls a-dragging on the floor; and that was the way she come to that 'ere party that day."

"Poor young thing!" sighed Beth, with tears in her eyes. "And did General Morris erect the monument?"

"They sez not," said the old lady. "They sez—but I can't tell yer as to the truth on it—that her lover put up the monymment to tell of her virtues and worth."

"Oh, had she a lover?" asked Beth eagerly. "I thought the romance sounded incomplete. A lover is always the central figure of interest, is he not, Jenny?"

"To you, of course," I remarked evasively.

As a married woman, I strive most religiously never to destroy a young girl's illusions.

"Had she a lover?" asked the old lady, in reply to Beth's earlier question. "To be sure, my dear; and a grand one and a brave one, as sich a fair young gal should. She was betrothed to Lieutenant Harrison,

a brave soldier, and afterwards President of the United States."

"The hero of Tippecanoe?" cried Beth. "Did n't I know there was a romance in it? and has n't this story been worth all our trouble in unearthing it, Jenny? How strange! To think, that, but for that early grave, she might have ruled as mistress of the White House! Look, Jenny: what a peaceful spot."

We had reached the chapel, a picturesque little building erected by the Morris family; and beside it, through the long damp grass, glistened the tombstones of the family graves.

We stood deep in reverie before the grave of General Morris, when, looking up, we came face to face with our truants.

They were wet to the skin, I am glad to say, and beautifully penitent.

Even Smyth looked slightly crestfallen as he heard our glowing accounts, and begged quite humbly to be taken next day to the old house.

"And we will go too," said Geoff.

But the next day I was kept in with a charming cold in the head; and Geoff, like a good boy, would n't leave me.

Beth offered to stay at home also; but, as that meant a whole day in Smyth's society, I begged of her to go.

"There is enough material in that house for a dozen romances," said she; "and I mean to write them up."

It was late when she came home.

"Well, Beth, have you found material for that story?" I inquired.

"Yes," said Beth, putting both arms about my neck, and kissing me with such a strange, sweet light in her eyes; "and, dear, it is a love-story, — and — Jenny — I am the heroine."

"Well, well, and who can the hero be?" I asked, pinching her burning cheek.

And then I thought of all the impossible heroes we had met during our stay.

"Why," said Beth, "who should it be, Jenny, but Mr. Smyth? I don't wonder you look surprised. I never dreamed that such a man as he could ever really care for foolish, good-for-nothing me."

Such a man as he! Verily, woman's love had transformed even Smyth into a hero.

I was literally struck dumb; and, what is more aggravating, Geoff quotes it, as a proof of man's perspicacity, that he had seen it from the very start.

OUR FRONT ROOM.

BY MARY FRANCES WILLIAMS.

"There!" said Bess, sitting down emphatically on the door-step, and fanning herself with her wide straw hat. "There! that front room must and shall be furnished!"

"I wish it might be," observed Harrie, dubiously; "but I don't feel much encouraged about it as yet."

"If I were you, Bessie, I'd order the suit in reps, and a tapestry carpet," I remarked, sarcastically. "I'm afraid we cannot quite afford Aubusson and satin brocade."

"How much money have you, Harrie?" asked Bess, ignoring my irony.

"Five dollars and forty-three cents," was Harrie's reply, after an inspection of her pocket-book.

"And you, Flo?"

"I have ten dollars," laughed I. "We shall not be able to rival the Bentons, I am afraid, Bessie dear."

The Bentons were our showy next-door neighbors, be it remarked, whose gorgeous parlor was at once the admiration and the despair of half the housekeepers in Norwoodville.

"The Bentons!" exclaimed Bessie, with superb scorn. "Do you suppose, Florabella, that I would ever sit down in our front room if it bore the faintest resemblance to that upholstery shop of the Bentons? Do you imagine?"

"Of course not!" I cried, with uplifted hands, warding off any more indignation.

"I don't suppose anything at all. But what has set you struggling with that impossible front room again?"

"'Tis n't impossible," retorted Bess. "I have twenty dollars all my own; that makes thirty-five between us. Now, if you girls will follow my directions, we can take that thirty-five dollars and furnish that front room."

"How?" I queried, helplessly; while Harrie evidently thought it of no use to say any more to a girl who talked such absurd nonsense as furnishing a parlor with thirty-five dollars.

We were three orphan sisters, keeping house together on an income so ridiculously small that any outlay for new furniture was quite out of the question; and yet the one desire of our three hearts was to furnish our parlor, a pretty room, but bare as any barn. We had a conveniently appointed kitchen, and a clean, cool dining-room, where we sat in the afternoons at our sewing. Our bedrooms were comfortably furnished; but for the parlor we had not so much as a table.

Tomorrow our quarterly income was due, but that we must live on for the next three months. So the thirty-five dollars left over from this quarter was all we could possibly count on, and that seemed too small a sum to think of in connection with the furnishing of our front room.

Bess was our head and shoulders, our right hand, our mainstay; and her capabil-

ities in the way of getting something out of nothing were truly remarkable, as witnessed by the fact of her possessing more money at the end of the quarter than both her sisters; though we had all the same allowance for our personal expenses, and Bessie's were the heaviest, on account of her being the largest and requiring the most dress material. Yet, in spite of Bessie's genius, the furnishing of that front room seemed exceedingly problematical.

"There is my contribution to the funds," remarked Bess, placing her twenty dollars on the top step. I deposited my ten beside it, and Harrie followed with her five.

Then we looked at Bess, and awaited an explanation.

"I have been reading in the Magazine," said Bess, "about a woman who furnished her parlor with fifty dollars, and had the prettiest room in town."

"But we have only thirty-five dollars," suggested I.

"And forty-three cents," supplemented Harrie.

"Well, that woman bought some things which we need not buy," replied Bess. "To be sure, she had a set of lovely old chairs which belonged to her great-grandmother, and which have just come into fashion; and somebody gave her a pair of pictures, and somebody else presented her with a statuette; and" —

"Do stop, Bess!" I cried, imploringly; while Harrie went off in a violent explosion of laughter.

"I don't suppose anybody will give us a picture, or beg the privilege of keeping a piano in our front room," said Bess, candidly; "although that also happened to the woman in the magazine. What I want is Ben Bradshaw's plane and saw, and Ben himself to operate them, and an old barrel or two."

"I suppose Ben and his tools are to be had for a thank you," remarked Harrie; "and there are barrels enough in the woodshed. They are good ones too. What are you going to do with them, Bessie?"

"You shall see," said Bessie, smiling wisely. "At present, let us go up to Merrion's and get some of that lovely straw matting for the floor."

"Straw matting will do very well for the present," said I; "but when it comes cold weather" —

"We must not begin to think of cold

weather in May," interrupted Bessie. "Perhaps by November some good luck will bring us a carpet. In summer, matting is a positive luxury."

We went to put on our things, of course, preparatory to visiting the carpet store; for we always obeyed Bessie's orders.

When we returned from the expedition, we were accompanied by a man with a wheelbarrow; and in that barrow were twenty-six yards of blue-and-cream-colored matting, of a nice quality, which we had bought for fifty cents a yard; also eight rolls of pretty gray wall-paper, at fifty cents a roll. When the paper was up and the matting was down, our front room was very clean and cool to look at.

"But we could look at the pretty matting and the blue-gray paper in Merrion's store just as well," said Harrie. "And I don't see where we are to get any furniture. Our ancestors did not leave us any antique chairs."

"We will make the curtains first," said Bessie, cheerfully, coming in at that moment, with her hat on, and a bundle in her hands. "I've just been down street and bought the materials."

And Bessie opened her bundle, and displayed a roll of snow-white muslin and some pale-blue cretonne.

"I paid forty cents a yard for the muslin," she said; "and I bought fifteen yards. Five yards to a window will be plenty, it is so wide. And the cretonne will make charming shades. It was sixty cents, and there are six yards. We'll make some lambrequins of it too for the windows, and for that ugly wooden mantel-shelf. You can make some blue-and-white tassels, Harrie, like those on your tidy, but larger. And here are the fixtures for the shades. They cost a dollar and a half for the three."

So we hung the blue shades in our three windows, with a blue-and-white crochet tassel pendant from each; and over them we draped the full white muslin curtains, with pretty blue lambrequins at the top. Harrie sacrificed her freshest blue ribbons to loop the curtains, although Harrie is a blonde, and blue ribbons are very becoming, twisted among her golden ringlets.

"Why, it is charming!" she cried, admiringly, regarding the effect from the doorway. "Now, Bessie, bring in your furniture!"

"Ben will bring the table this evening,"

said Bessie. "And I can promise a lounge and two arm-chairs and a pair of ottomans. There! my ideas and the money will give out together."

Ben did bring the table; a great round pine affair of his own manufacture, — rude enough, certainly, but he had planed it smooth, and stained the legs with umber, in imitation of walnut; and even that did not matter much, for very little of them showed when Bessie had covered it with a sheer-white tablecloth, abstracted from the dining-room.

"There now!" she exclaimed, in triumph; "could anything be neater? It will hold piles of books and papers, and that's all we want it for. Who's going to lift the cover to see if it is walnut? We will cover it with white cloths for the summer (thank our stars, we've plenty of table linen!), and next quarter I promise to save ten dollars from my allowance to buy a cover for it. I had Ben make it nice and big, because I *hate* a small table: I like one that everybody can gather around and be sociable."

After the table followed, at intervals of a day or two, the other articles which Bessie had enumerated. First, a lounge, — perhaps it would be better called a sofa, — composed of a long packing-box, with one side knocked out, and a square block under each corner. These square legs were stained with umber, in imitation of walnut, like the table-legs.

Bessie expended all the rest of her money for blue-and-white chintz, — a distractingly pretty pattern, and bought at a bargain. With this she covered that unpromising sofa, stuffing the cushions with corn-husks; and the two big square pillows were ornamented at each corner with Harrie's pretty tassels. Upon my word, the sofa was as

pretty an article of furniture as the Bentons had in their house.

Then Ben brought us two large casks, — or hogsheads, or whatever you call them, — sawed down lengthwise to the proper height for a seat, and then sawed off crosswise, and a board fitted in. These also were covered with the pretty chintz, and well cushioned with husks; and they made the coziest arm-chairs imaginable. Harrie finished them off with crochet and netted tidies. Bessie's ottomans were simply two soap-boxes, cushioned on top, and covered with chintz.

We took a few chairs from the other rooms and added to this array. We cut engravings out of old magazines, and framed them with straw and *passe-partout* frames; we took the fine landscape painting from the dining-room, and brought it into the parlor; Bessie brought down her pet chromo of the "Cenci" from her bedroom, and placed it between the eastern windows; lastly, we filled two great conch-shells with growing vines, and suspended them one at each corner of the high, old-fashioned mantel-shelf, now prettily "upholstered" in blue *cretonne*; and our front room was furnished.

I say nothing about the flowers with which we kept the room always adorned, in vases, in pots, in flat dishes; but perhaps they did more than anything else to make our room attractive to us and to our friends. It was cool and dainty to the eye, and all summer our friends kept telling us how pleasant it was to come in there and sit down. Sam and Millie Benton came in often of an evening, and they thought it a prettier room than their mother's grand parlor.

And all for thirty-five dollars.

"And forty-three cents!" says Harrie.

OUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS.

BY BRITOMARTE.

"How many of them are there, Lou?" asked Pet, knocking my favorite geranium off the flower-stand. Pet was always knocking over something; and I picked up the fragments as a matter of course.

"Only three," answered Lou. "A pale, elderly gentleman, who looked like an invalid; a lady who might be old or young, handsome or ugly, for she was so closely veiled that I could not see her face; and a young gentleman."

"What sort of young gentleman?" asked Pet, with innocent curiosity.

"Ahem!" coughed Lou.

"What does that mean, Lou?" smiled I.

"If our next-door neighbors are sociable, Pet will be getting into difficulty!"

Pet gave her a withering look, and swept out of the room, leaving Lou and I to discuss the subject alone.

We were three sisters; daughters of the village lawyer, and belles of much importance in our little social circle. Pet, the youngest (whose proper name was Jane), had brown eyes, and red hair, which she called auburn, *retrousse* nose, a little bit of an apology for a mouth, and was the most popular of our trio, though both Lou and I were prettier than she. Pet was terribly susceptible to the attractions of the opposite gender. She was always falling in love or getting out of it; making or breaking engagements. She was seventeen, and had been six times engaged!

Lou was the prettiest among us, though some people (especially one person) preferred my hazel eyes and dark braids to her yellow curls and pink cheeks and white fingers. She had a hateful, sarcastic way of speaking, which made people sometimes forget her beauty, — though Pet and I knew she did not mean half the spiteful things she said. She had an odd ambition to be thought quite cynical and devoid of sentiment; which she was not, by any means.

As for me, Aldine, I was Miss Lester, and I flattered myself that I sustained my dignity very well. Being engaged to my father's prospective partner, Tom Thayer, I took less interest than my sisters in the

young gentleman, whose advent in our village society was to be, according to Lou's prediction, so disastrous to Pet. But, of course, after the prevailing topic of conversation among us for a month had been the future occupants of the "Vine Cottage," I was interested to know who and what they were, now that they had come. The cottage had been unoccupied for almost a year, and we were all concerned lest our new neighbors should not be so "nice" as the last.

Their "goods" had arrived some days before, and we were quite impatient for the family to follow them. Pet and I were not at home when at last they did come, and only Lou saw them arrive, so we at once upon our return assailed her with questions about them, with the result above recorded.

For the first few days of their residence at the Vine Cottage we saw nothing of our new neighbors. Then papa called there, made the acquaintance of the gentlemen, came home and told us all about them, and added that he should approve of our calling upon the lady, who was both young and pretty. Their name was Pembroke, and papa thought, from appearances, that they were wealthy. Mr. Pembroke was a widower, and an invalid; he had leased the cottage on account of the quiet and retirement of our village. His son and daughter were both present when papa called, and he liked them exceedingly.

Miss Pembroke had said she should be very glad to make our acquaintance, and accordingly Pet, Lou, and I made her a formal call. We were received with the greatest courtesy and cordiality by Miss Pembroke, who introduced her father, and entertained us in a charming manner.

She was about my age, — twenty-two, — and very pretty. A sweet, graceful, womanly girl, accomplished and refined, but without the least affectation. Her father called her Adele.

We were all admiring some bead-work which she had just finished, when a firm step passed the open window, a clear voice whistled a few bars of an air from "Mar-

tha;" and Miss Pembroke glanced at her father, and said, with a smile of pleasure, — "George is coming."

The step came into the hall, and presently there entered the very handsomest young man I ever saw. He was not very tall, was elegant in figure, and graceful in his movements; his features were regular, and his mustache could not have been improved.

Pet was smitten at first sight. Lou conveyed as much to me, by means of a nudge which I very well understood. When Mr. Pembroke, the elder, introduced "My son, George, young ladies," Pet was quite overcome, although, of course, all in a quiet, invisible way, perceptible only to us who had seen the beginning and ending of so many of Pet's affairs.

"Pet will break another engagement to-morrow!" said Lou, when we had taken leave; for Pet's present engagement was to a young student of the "University."

And certainly, from that day forth, I would not have given much for the student's prospects of marrying my sister. George Pembroke was the very particular style of man that Pet especially admired, being dark and stately, like the fine princes of whom she was always dreaming; and his manner was enough to fascinate any susceptible damsel; proud and chivalrous, yet delicately polite and deferential. But for Tom, perhaps I might have been fascinated too.

Our acquaintance progressed. We became quite intimate with Adele, and Pet determinedly set her cap at Mr. George. He was not so readily entangled as most of her unfortunate victims. He flirted with her, certainly; but through it all he seemed quite heart-whole. He was very polite to me, also, and seemed to have quite an admiration for Lou.

They would talk about pictures, and statuary, and architecture (Lou had rather artistic tastes), until I grew quite bored. He was always bringing new books for her to criticise (she was a bit literary too), and, really, they were quite what you might call Platonic. For Lou never flirted, like me; or had desperate love-affairs, like Pet. That was what I told Tom, when he once hinted that George Pembroke was flirting with both my sisters.

What a stupid blockhead I must have been not to notice all that I remembered

after! How Lou never said anything hateful to him, and how eagerly she listened to his dry art talk, and literary criticisms, — dry to me at least, and to Pet, who nearly stretched her ridiculous little mouth into reasonable proportions, with yawning over them. And how she would sit looking dreamily after him, when he went away from our house, after these discussions; and how, sometimes, when his name chanced to be mentioned, she would look up quickly from her music or her book, and then blush a little, and drop her great turquoise eyes again, with most elaborate indifference. I remembered all these things one day, but then I never dreamed of suspecting that Lou loved George Pembroke!

One day he went away to a neighboring town, and when he came back he brought a friend with him; a gay young fellow, with nothing particularly impressive about him, except his good humor. He was introduced to us as Mr. Cline. We all liked him, and invited him to come over with Adele and George, and spend a social evening, as we were in the habit of doing together.

And a very chatty, pleasant evening we had. After they were gone, Pet declared she liked Mr. Cline almost as well as Mr. Pembroke. She likes him a great deal better now; she is Mrs. Herbert Cline, at this present writing!

"But did you ever see any one so irresistibly comical, girls?" she asked. "Did you notice his calling Adele 'Mrs. Pembroke'?" "I don't see the special wit in that," said Lou scornfully.

Neither did I, and I thought it rather odd, to say the least, that he should continue the questionable joke the next time we met. At last I spoke of it one evening when the three were at our house.

"Mr. Cline," said I, "why in the world do you always call Adele 'Mrs. Pembroke'?"

I spoke in rather disapproving accents, and Mr. Cline gave me a surprised look, cast a glance at Adele, colored slightly, and replied, —

"Miss Lester, I could not have the impertinence to address Mrs. Pembroke by her given name; that would be presuming upon George's friendship!"

I looked as bewildered as I felt, and Pet burst out, —

"Do you mean to tell us that Adele is a married woman?"

Adele began to laugh.

"Why, girls!" she cried, "is that why you always called me 'Miss Pembroke'?" Did you really think I was a maiden?"

"Of course!" said I. "And I am perfectly confounded. Why — how" —

"Dear me!" cried Adele, in paroxysms of mirth; "it is so funny, and yet it is all very natural, too; papa only introduced me as his daughter, and there has been no occasion to undeceive you, — but what did you take George for?"

"For your brother!" faltered I, while Pet grew very red, and Lou very white.

Adele fairly screamed at that. Mr. Cline looked unutterable amusement, and Mr. Pembroke laughed prodigiously. At last Adele found breath to exclaim, —

"To think you did not know he was my husband! George, George, you unmitigated deception! I do believe you knew what they thought."

Mr. Pembroke protested on his honor that he had n't had the faintest inkling of a suspicion.

"And do you know," continued Adele gayly, "I thought that you and Miss Pet were flirting rather audaciously, all things considered! I had half a mind to be jealous, actually."

And I knew she meant it, though she laughed.

Pet laughed, too, and blushed. Just then Lou got up, in her superbly indolent way, and said she had really forgotten an appointment. She begged to be excused, and quietly left the room.

Ten minutes later I had occasion to go upstairs after something which they wished to see, and I found Lou lying in a death-like swoon across the threshold of her room. She clutched two bits of paper in her hand, and when I took them from between her stiff fingers I saw it was a card photograph torn in two, — a photograph of George Pembroke!

That revealed the whole. I was completely stunned; but I put the bits of paper in the fire, got Lou to bed, and called my maid. She was ill a long time, but no one ever suspected the cause. I never alluded to it myself, nor did Lou, until years after — when she was quite an old maid, for she is still single. Then she confessed that she had never forgotten that night, and never should. She never speaks of George Pembroke, and hates the very sight of Pet's husband; and, though I still correspond with Adele (they are not now our next-door neighbors), I never show her letters to Lou.

OUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS.

BY MISS MARY J. FIELD.

The prettiest and most fashionable part of Bayswater—to my mind, at least—is Alton Terrace, Alton Road. It is a broad open road. The houses are large and elegant, the trees are noted for their unusual size, the conservatories present uniform brilliancy of bloom. There is no trace of the poverty and misery, the dirt and squalor that abound in the great city. Everything speaks of wealth, fashion, and cultivated taste.

The houses are semi-detached. Some people consider that a drawback; but, if the next-door neighbors are pleasant and agreeable, I do not see how it can be considered one. It is true it brings people into such close connection that it seems as though they occupied but one house, and formed but one family. That was especially the case in Alton Terrace. The two houses had but one back entrance, but one gate that would admit a carriage, but one entrance to the stables, and many other things in common. It behooved us, therefore, to be on friendly terms with our neighbors. The people who lived in Alton Terrace were most of them wealthy and fashionable. It was considered a piece of rare good fortune to be able to secure a house there. We were all proud of our locality.

My brother and myself had lived at No. 4 for many years. He was born there. Ours was a sad story. My dear father was killed in a railway accident. I was then about fifteen, and my baby-brother only two years old. My mother wore away her life by constantly grieving after the husband she loved so dearly, and we were left alone and almost friendless. Fortunately we had not to suffer from want, for my father had been a wealthy man, and his property was fairly divided between my brother and myself. An old aunt of my mother's—almost the only relative we had—came to live with us, and she managed the house until I was old enough to do it myself.

My baby-brother Gerald was my sole charge. I have no words with which to tell how dearly I loved him. Years and years ago I loved and might have married, but the

man I loved was going abroad, and when he asked me to join him and share his home in India, I was obliged to refuse, for I could not leave my brother. He was educated at Oxford, and I was proud of his talents. Although he had property enough to live quite comfortably upon, my brother was ambitious, and positively refused to live at his ease. He liked work, and work he would. "A profession," he said, "dignifies a man." He chose the Bar, much to my delight, for I had feared that he would prefer a military life.

At this time Gerald Desmond Fitzgerald—a name of which my brother was very proud—was one of the finest and noblest young men I ever knew. He was not, strictly speaking, handsome; but he had a thoughtful face with large dark eyes and firm, sensitive lips. He was tall and well made; and a frank, open disposition, a kindly genial nature, with a fund of high spirits, and a quaint love of humor, made him the delight of all who knew him. The only way in which it was possible to offend him was by turning his beautiful name into a very vulgar one, and calling him "Jerry" instead of "Gerald." This pained him exceedingly; he could bear anything better than that. I am sure he would rather have lost all his fortune than have gone through life as "Jerry Fitzgerald."

He was rising in his profession,—altogether it would have been difficult to find a happier man. He had no trouble or care, no anxiety, save for his clients; his home was pleasant,—nay, more than that, we were really gay, for we were both fond of society, and our evenings were delightful, and, if we did not see our friends at home, we were sure to receive invitations for two or three evening parties every week. Perhaps one secret of our popularity was the well-known fact that Gerald was "a most excellent match." How many fair young faces smiled and blushed and brightened under his glance! How polite and attentive all the "mamas" were to me, asking my advice about "dear Laura" and "Jane," as though I were a matron instead of an old

maid! But neither blushes nor smiles had won Gerald yet; and, when I rallied him about the pretty girls who evidently cared for him, he only laughed and said he liked his sister best.

Our next-door neighbors for many years were an old gentleman and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Martin; he was a retired merchant, supposed to have accumulated a large fortune. Every one felt regret when he died and his widow announced her intention of leaving London altogether. No one regretted it so much as I did, for I was deeply attached to my beautiful home, and what was to become of me if we should have disagreeable neighbors? Half the comfort of my life would be destroyed. It was therefore with great anxiety that I watched the persons who came to look at the house.

One morning a very grand but rather showy carriage drove up to the door, and a stout imperious-looking lady descended. She was accompanied by two tall, elegantly dressed girls; and I was infinitely amused by the airs and graces of the whole party. They were very fine ladies indeed, — so they evidently considered themselves. An obsequious but gaudily dressed footman attended them, and they spent some considerable time in looking over the house. I heard the eldest lady say, as she returned to the carriage, —

“The house is very well; if the neighborhood suits me, I shall take it; but of course we must be particular in knowing who our neighbors are.”

This little speech, on being duly reported to Gerald, caused him great amusement. Unfortunately I could not describe the personal appearance of the ladies, as they were closely veiled. Apparently all inquiries were satisfactorily answered, for in a few days the house was full of workmen, painting, papering, and making alterations of all kinds. In less than a month large vans of furniture arrived, and finally the family took possession of their new abode. We were infinitely amused at their name. On the second day of their arrival the smart footman appeared at the door with “Mrs. De Courcy Evans’s compliments, and she would be glad to know where she could obtain a key for the garden gate.” It was a mere ruse, of course.

“Did ever any one hear of such a name?” cried my brother in amazement. “De Courcy Evans! Which is which, I won-

der? Is she a ‘De Courcy’ or an ‘Evans’? We shall have some amusement, Nellie, I see.”

As a matter of course I was compelled to call upon Mrs. Evans. I absolutely refused to use two names where one sufficed. There were several little neighborly arrangements to make, and as an older resident it was my duty to wait upon the new-comer.

I gave a sigh to the memory of Mr. Martin as I went into the well-known drawing-room. He had been a man of cultivated taste, — one who enjoyed and appreciated beautiful things, — and his house had been a marvel for its many treasures of valuable pictures and statues. I remembered the costly plants in white marble vases that used to adorn the spacious entrance hall. That was all changed now, and the house gave one a general impression of glitter and show. Immense pictures badly painted, carpets of the brightest possible colors and largest patterns, furniture made rather for show than for use, — all told as plainly as could be how different was the taste that now presided over the house.

I waited some minutes in the smart drawing-room, and then the lady sailed in. Tall, stout, and rosy, with a shrewd, haughty face, a florid and somewhat vulgar manner, a loud and not very musical voice, a deep sense of her own importance and grandeur, — such was the lady who was announced to me as Mrs. De Courcy Evans. She overwhelmed me with civilities; she was so delighted to see me; she considered herself so very fortunate in having me for a neighbor; she had been so anxious, — “For, as you must be aware, my dear Miss Fitzgerald, with young daughters I am obliged to be very careful and select.”

The young daughters made an agreeable diversion. The bell was rung, and Thomas was desired to summon Miss De Courcy Evans and Miss Arabella. They were exact reproductions of their mother, — tall, proud girls, not without some show of beauty, but it was of a bold and brilliant kind, — eyes and hair as dark as night, cheeks that rivaled a damask rose, and large smiling lips that revealed very white but rather large teeth, — girls who were evidently anxious to be considered as belonging to the most “exclusive class.” They talked about the “set” they moved in. One represented it as very wide, sighing at the same time as though she were overwhelmed with the du-

tles of society; the other called it very select, and looked as though I ought to be honored by her notice. In the course of twenty minutes' conversation they mentioned the name of "Lady Soles" more than fifty times, I believe, being anxious to impress me with a due sense of their exalted position in society.

"Do you know Lady Soles?" Mrs. Evans asked, with an attempt at indifference.

I replied that I had not that pleasure, — at which she evidently pitied me very much.

"Lady Soles is very particular," she remarked. "She moves in one of the best sets. But I think I might venture to say that she would be pleased to know any friend of ours."

I do not know whether I rose or fell in their estimation when I declined the honor of being introduced under their auspices. I could not help smiling to myself as I thought how astonished and delighted they would be if they knew that I was actually a third cousin of a countess; I could imagine how they would talk about me and my "noble connexions."

Mrs. De Courcy Evans was very bland and amiable, and we made all our little neighborly arrangements pleasantly together. The girls became quite gushing when I took my leave, and hoped we should become very good friends. Of the two I certainly liked Miss Arabella best, but, of all horrible beings, to my mind the most wretched is the *parvenu* who cringes to and fawns upon those who bear a title. I could imagine Mrs. De Courcy Evans and her daughters "worshipping a lord" and toadying "a lady." I mentally resolved to have as little to do with them as possible; but, to my annoyance, when I gave the particulars of my interview to Gerald, he was infinitely amused, and insisted upon my cultivating the acquaintance.

"Your Mrs. Evans will be worth her weight in gold to me, Nellie," he said. "I have seen and studied almost every variety of character, but she seems to be original; ask them all for this evening."

When I ventured to suggest that it was scarcely polite or kind to invite people merely to laugh at them, he looked grave, and assured me that he would respect all the good qualities he observed, that he would never say an unkind or sarcastic word about or to the ladies, but that he merely wished to see a specimen of what he was quite sure

Thackeray would call "the British Female Snob." I thought he was severe, but afterward I knew that he was a better judge of character than myself.

I sent a little note inviting Mrs. De Courcy Evans and her daughters to spend the evening with us on Tuesday. I invited a few other friends to meet them; and we had a very pleasant evening, — pleasant in every way. Somehow I had an idea that Gerald was extracting a fund of quiet amusement from his guests. Nothing could exceed his kindness and courtesy to them, but I fancied he listened with too much attention to their anecdotes of "Lady Soles." The young ladies sang, and their music was just like themselves, showy and brilliant, but without a particle of sentiment or feeling. They managed Verdi's music well, but I trembled when Miss Arabella began one of Mendelssohn's sweetest songs.

Mrs. De Courcy Evans contrived during the evening to acquaint both my brother and myself with the fact that her "papa" had held "an office under Government." One would have thought from her tone that he had been at least an influential statesman. Imagine Gerald's delight and amusement when, some weeks afterward, he quite accidentally learned from a gentleman who had known her many years that the worthy man had been neither more nor less than an exciseman in a small country town.

It was not until some time afterward that we heard of Mr. De Courcy Evans. I had noticed a small, timid-looking man going out of No. 6 every morning and returning every evening. He gave me the idea of one who was frightened at the grandeur of his own house. He was never present at any of his wife's parties, or "*soirees*," as she delighted to call them. The girls never spoke of him. He had a large and very important business in the city, but in his own home he was most thoroughly and completely ignored and overlooked. No one was ever told of his existence; he was a mere cipher, the money-getter of the establishment, but not its master. Once, when I inquired after his health, Mrs. Evans sighed, and, in the midst of a long preamble, told me that his ways were not her ways, and made a very pathetic allusion to the "fate of those who marry beneath them."

As time wore on, and we gradually became more intimate with our next-door neighbors, I saw how much of their lives was sacrificed

to show, how much was false and unreal, how much was spent in a vain struggle to be classed amongst those who by birth and high breeding were far above them. They would endure anything to be able to speak of a lady of title as a friend; they would suffer any amount of trouble, expense, and snubbing to be able to say that they had attended "Lady So-and-So's ball." They seemed to have no ideas beyond these, to know no love, no worship, save that of Mammon. Home comfort was sacrificed to show; they lived for society, and cared not what they sacrificed in order to secure a good position in it.

One evening my brother and myself were in the garden. It was a pleasant summer night; the June roses were blooming, the lilies were in flower. We were talking about a case he had just then in hand, in which he was much interested; a sudden breeze carried a delicate and costly silk handkerchief from my hand, and sent it over into the next garden.

"Gerald," I cried, "go after it. I should not like to lose it."

We could see it lying on the grass-plot. -

"Nellie," he said indolently, "I will buy you a box of French handkerchiefs to-morrow, but I am not in the humor just now to encounter Mrs. De Courcy Evans and her charming daughters."

"They are gone out," I told him, - "I saw them drive away an hour ago."

Then he went in search of my handkerchief. To my infinite surprise he was away more than half an hour. I could not imagine what he was doing. I could hear the sound of his voice. He was evidently talking to some one in the garden; and I, who knew every inflection of his voice so well, could tell that he admired the "some one" with whom he was conversing. Through the trees I fancied that I saw the glimmer of a white dress, and yet I knew that the ladies were out. Presently my brother returned, very much excited.

"I say, Nellie, here is a mystery! Do you know that your charming friend next door has a niece living with her?"

"No," I said, in some little surprise; "I have never seen her."

"And never will, if Mrs. De Courcy Evans know it," he returned. "It is a regular case of Cinderella, the glass slipper, and the two proud sisters."

"Don't be absurd, Gerald," I said.

"I'll try not, but only imagine! I have just seen Miss Evans. She is not a De Courcy, but she is - I will not describe her; you shall see her and judge for yourself."

She was evidently something striking, for Gerald could not forget her.

"Only imagine," he would break out every now and then, - "keeping a girl like that at work and shut up! I have never known such a thing. She would be more admired than any girl in the neighborhood if she were ever seen or known. What can the woman be thinking of?"

"Perhaps she is not related to her," I suggested.

"But she is, Nellie; she told me herself that she is a niece of Mr. Evans."

"Where did you see her?" I asked.

"She was in the garden. I suppose she does not often go into it when the others are at home. She picked up your handkerchief, and I staid talking to her."

"You called her Cinderella," I said with a smile. "Take care that you are not the young prince."

"Just see, the next time you call, if Mrs. Evans says anything about her niece, will you, Nellie?" requested my brother on the morning following his discovery. "If she does not, it would be better for you to mention that I saw her in the garden. She will be obliged to introduce her then."

Seeing that he was really anxious and interested, I consented to call on that very day. Although I staid nearly an hour, and gave the lady several hints through which she could have spoken, she never named her niece. I began to fancy Gerald must have been dreaming, for there was no sign of his Cinderella. After I had listened for some time to an eloquent description of the glories of the party the Evanses had attended on the preceding evening, I began to think I ought to enter upon Gerald's business.

"My brother had quite an agreeable little adventure last evening," I said.

Any mention of him was quite sufficient to engross their whole attention at once, and all three regarded me with a most amiable smile. I related the loss of my little handkerchief and its recovery.

"My brother considered it a very fortunate little accident," I continued, "for it procured him an introduction to a very charming young lady. I should be delighted if I could obtain the same favor myself,

for I have not had the pleasure of seeing your niece yet, Mrs. Evans."

Never did a few words make so great a sensation; the amiable smiles changed to the darkest of frowns.

"My niece?" said the lady stiffly, and with what was intended to be great dignity. "Certainly, Miss Fitzgerald,—I never dreamed of introducing her to you."

"But I should be so pleased to make her acquaintance," I replied, with a smile; and there was a look of great consternation from one to another.

"I have scarcely considered it wise, in my niece's position, to introduce her into society," said Mrs. Evans; "but I cannot refuse any request of yours, Miss Fitzgerald. Arabella, ring the bell, my dear."

There was a long lapse of time between the summons and the entrance of the mysterious young lady. The moment I saw her I understood why Mrs. Evans kept her in the background, and why my brother had taken so great an interest in her. Charm a man's eyes, and his heart is sure, more or less, to follow the lead. Any one more likely to charm than this secluded young lady I have never seen. She had one of the sweetest of faces, as modest, as fresh, and as fair as a blooming spring flower,—a face as different from the somewhat bold and startling beauty of her cousins as it was possible to conceive. Dark violet eyes and pale golden hair neatly braided, lips as fresh as a rosebud, with a most winning smile, delicate little hands that bore traces of hard work, a slender graceful figure, a musical voice, and a sweet manner, completed the charms of one of the loveliest girls I have ever seen. She seemed to be about seventeen, not older, and she was almost painfully timid and shy.

"Marion," said Mrs. Evans crossly, "Miss Fitzgerald wishes to see you. Why did you not tell me that you had seen Mr. Fitzgerald last evening? You know how much I dislike concealment of any kind."

"I would have told you, aunt," replied the girl, blushing and hesitating, "but you were out all the evening, and I have not seen you since."

"Never besly," continued Mrs. Evans,—"I cannot endure it. I am always reproofing you, Arabella, for being too open and candid, if it be possible. I wish your cousin had err on the same side."

If ever any human being looked truthful

and frank, it was the young girl whose eyes began to fill with tears. Anxious to put an end to this "scene," I began to speak to her, the three ladies looking on contemptuously the while. Her replies evinced intelligence and even talent; but she was too shy and timid to do herself justice. She looked at her aunt every time she spoke, as though fearful of drawing down some sharp criticism.

Mrs. Evans might well keep her in the background; there was no chance for her showy daughters in the presence of this beautiful graceful girl. I began to perceive that it was jealousy that had caused her to be secluded and kept out of sight. I felt a strong interest in her,—indeed, if I had followed my own inclination, I would have folded the little figure in my arms there and then and promised to love her; but I saw that I must go very cautiously to work. I did not include her in an invitation I gave the others; I thought it best to seem to take but little notice of her; I could do her more good by going to work gradually than by making a very violent beginning. Her aunt dismissed her in a few minutes, and then all eyes were turned eagerly to me.

"Do you think my cousin pretty?" inquired Arabella. And I saw at once how much depended on my reply.

"She seems a nice child," I answered; and the three faces before me cleared and brightened at the word "child."

"Yes," said Mrs. Evans; "but I am obliged to be very strict and careful with her lest the unfortunate child should take after her mother. She is a very great trouble to me, I assure you."

"I always told you, mamma," put in Miss De Courcy Evans, "that you were too kind and indulgent to her; you should have sent her to school, and not have burdened yourself with her in the manner you have done."

"One must do one's duty, my dear," rejoined her mother, with an attempt at Christian meekness and patience; "she requires constant supervision."

"And she gets it, poor child!" I thought to myself.

Later on Mrs. Evans confided the girl's history to me. From the way in which she spoke of her I had begun to imagine that there was really something disgraceful connected with her. She called her "unfortunate," and spoke of her "miserable circumstances" and her "sad position" until I

found my self wondering whether, after all, she had not done well in keeping her retired. But the facts of the case were very simple; the disgrace was merely poverty and helplessness, — two great evils in the eyes of such as Mrs. Evans.

Mr. Evans had but one sister; she was many years younger than himself. She lived with him, and continued to do so after his marriage with the stately lady who bore his name. She was a pretty, loving girl, this Miss Evans, and her brother's home was not a very happy one for her. It became still less so after her fair youthful face had attracted the attention of Mr. Simpson, a retired drysalter, a man of great wealth, but without one charm to touch the heart of a young girl. Old, cross, ill-favored, and coarse, — such was the kind of husband Mrs. Evans urged upon her sister-in-law. I could well understand the persecution and misery the girl endured; but she ended it all by running away with a poor ensign in a marching regiment. Her husband was ordered abroad one year after their marriage. He was obliged to leave his young wife behind him; but he arranged for her to rejoin him when her baby should be old enough for her to take it to India. They were, however, never to meet again on earth. The poor wife died when her little daughter was born, and Mr. Evans was compelled to take charge of the helpless little babe. His wife consented after much grumbling, and little Marion was taken to the home her poor young mother had so lately left. I could not refrain from weeping when I thought of the loveless, joyless life of that poor child. No mother's gentle hand had ever touched her; her whole life had been one series of slights. She was never placed on terms of equality with her cousins; as soon as she was old enough to work, she became a kind of drudge to them, and so saved them the expense of a maid. As years passed on and her patient face grew in beauty, they began to dislike her. One or two persons had admired her immensely, and her aunt, to whom all such praises were as bitter as gall, resolved to keep her quite out of all society.

A more dreary life than the one led by this young girl could not be imagined. In the morning she was required to assist in arranging and dusting rooms; her afternoons were spent in sewing for her cousins, and her evenings in assisting to dress them, —

after which she was graciously permitted to go to bed. Those evening hours were the child's only solace. No one ever cared to penetrate into her attic, and she studied there often until after midnight. There was a good library in the house, kept rather for show than for use. One by one she had read nearly all the volumes it contained. History, poetry, biography, novels, all were perused alike. Reading was her one delight and solace. The consequence was that at seventeen, although she did not know one note of music, and could not speak one word of any language except her own, she had an astonishing amount of general information, and had read more than most people of twice her age.

Up in her lonely room the girl had dreamed her dreams. She had tried to think and fancy what her dead mother's face had been like, — how she would have caressed and loved her if she had lived! Then she thought of the father who was still living, but who seemed to have forgotten her. She did not lament and mourn over her lonely fate; she did not weep for love that would never be hers; but, as years passed on, she grew patient and humble, wondering always if any change would ever come to her, — if her life would ever be bright and glad as other lives were. She grew more timid and shy, for she perceived she was disliked by the only people she could call her relations. Her uncle was kind to her. He had always loved the fair young sister whose short life ended so sadly, and he loved her child for her sake. But he never dared to show his affection. When she was little, he bought her toys and dainties such as children love, and she kept them stored away in her room. Now that she was older, he was more helpless. He knew that every mark or sign of love he showed to the child was resented by his haughty wife, and he was not brave enough to incur her anger. Still he was kind, and, when Mrs. De Courcy Evans and her daughters were enjoying themselves at balls and parties, the poor old man and his beautiful niece spent some pleasant hours together.

Of Marion's father they had not heard for many years. During her infancy he had written several times. His last letter begged of the family to take every care of her, — to love and cherish her as though she were their own, — and when he returned he would amply repay them. That was eleven years

back; since then they had heard no word of or from him.

The world had been kind to George Evans. Money had flowed into his hands, everything he undertook prospered. He had risen from a comparatively low position to a high one. He was known as a man of substantial wealth. His wife's ambition had grown with their riches. She had long given up the friends she had known when her husband was a poor man and they lived in some humble suburb. To all appearance she had completely forgotten that part of her life. How she came by the name of "De Courcy" was a puzzle. Gerald declared that she had taken it of her own accord, trusting that the sound of it would do away with the plain severity of Evans. Her daughters had been educated at different fashionable boarding-schools, and, by dint of policy, perseverance, and flattery, they had managed to get into some fair society. The worst trait in their characters was their unkind treatment of Marion. One could smile at their affectations and graces, but my indignation was strongly aroused at their conduct to her. Gerald and I spoke of her constantly. He would call her Cinderella.

One day I called at No. 6, and was fortunate enough to find Marion alone. She was arranging the drawing-room; the three ladies were out. She was rather shy at first, but in a few minutes we were quite friendly. Her timidity wore away, and I was enchanted with her. She had a quick, lively fancy, a wonderful gift of repartee, a musical laugh that cheered one to hear. She was not at all the same girl I had seen before. Better than all that, I liked her good principle and loyalty. Not one word did she breathe against her aunt or cousins. She said nothing either of herself to show that she was lonely and neglected. I saw that she was of a true and loyal nature. I loved her for it. I learned her name, — Marion Branscombe, — and I noticed that, when I alluded to that evening on which my brother had seen her for the first time, the fair young face grew rosy red.

I invited Mrs. Evans and her daughters to a large evening party, and begged them to allow Marion to come. Mrs. Evans demurred for some time, and at last most reluctantly consented. Gerald was delighted when he heard that Marion was to be one of our guests. Once or twice, in her aunt's absence, I had seen her in the garden, and

the day I had secured this pleasure for her I saw her again, and told her she was coming to see me. I shall never forget her ecstasy of delight.

"A real party, Miss Fitzgerald?" she cried. "I have never seen one even. Oh, how happy I shall be!"

Her uncle, she told me a few days afterward, had bought her a beautiful white Indian muslin dress, and a cluster of convolvuli for her hair.

"I do not think I shall know myself," she cried naively. "I dream about the party every night. I never can get it out of my mind. Something will happen to disappoint me, I am afraid, if I think so much of it."

"Nothing is likely to happen," I said, touched beyond measure by the sweet wistful face uplifted to mine.

Nothing could exceed the warmth of the friendship the three ladies displayed toward me. I saw plainly that Mrs. Evans had resolved upon marrying one of her daughters to my brother. When alone with me, she extolled their virtues until I knew them by heart. Arabella was the one specially designed for the conquest. She would timidly inquire after my brother's health, and then sigh gently.

"Do you know, Miss Fitzgerald," she said to me one day, "I think your brother is the handsomest man I have ever seen." Then, affecting to be ashamed of her childish simplicity, she added, "Do not tell him what I have said, or I shall never look him in the face again."

She did not appear very delighted though when I gravely assured her that I would do no such thing. She had hoped to be teased and rallied. She did not know how thoroughly I was accustomed to be wooed for my brother's sake.

The siege had begun in good earnest. Arabella assumed a pensive look, and her mother and sister evinced the greatest tenderness and sympathy for her. Gerald and I were invited several times for a "quiet evening," when the beautiful Marion did not appear, and no mention was made of her, but, by the merest accident in the world, Arabella was left alone with my brother. I do not know whether he remarked it, — he never named it to me; but I smiled to myself when I thought of the waste of time.

On the morning of our party I saw Ger-

old taking the greatest possible pains with a bouquet of flowers. It was certainly very beautiful; it consisted of lilies-of-the-valley and white violets. He bestowed much trouble on the arrangement, and then fastened it with dainty white ribbon.

"There, Nellie," he said triumphantly, "is not that a *chef-d'œuvre*? Guess whom it is for."

"That I cannot," I replied.

"The belle of belles, — Miss Marion Branscombe," he said languidly, — "the sweetest girl, not merely in Bayswater, but in all the world."

"You had better not let her aunt see you give her that," I remarked.

"I shall manage it. I intend opening that worthy lady's eyes some day. How beautiful Marion will look! I wish it were evening."

Great was our sorrow and indignation when Mrs. De Courcy Evans and her daughters sailed in without Marion. The room was already full of guests, so that there was not much time for explanation. Mrs. Evans merely said that we must see her niece at another time, for really she had not the courage to bring so large a party.

"Four ladies! You know, my dear Miss Fitzgerald, it would have been too much; and Marion herself saw it and offered to stay at home."

I remembered the happy childish face that had looked into mine as she told me how she dreamed of the party by day and night, and I felt both rage and sorrow for her disappointment.

I bowed very coldly to the proud scheming woman. I knew all about it. I could see Marion in her white dress, with the convolvuli on her golden hair, and I knew that her relatives had refused to bring her because she looked so beautiful, — she would have eclipsed them. I never saw Gerald so angry; politeness forbade his showing it.

"She shall have her flowers, Nellie, and have them to-night," he whispered.

"How can you manage that?" I asked.

"Leave it to me," was the reply. "All is fair in love and war."

He said no more. He did his duty. He danced with Miss De Courcy Evans and with Miss Arabella; and then for about half an hour I missed him, but I guessed whither he had gone.

It was late before our party broke up. I had never seen Gerald so animated nor so

happy before. He seemed to have forgiven Mrs. Evans, for he talked and laughed with her; he was in the wildest of spirits. When the last carriage drove away, he ran back into the drawing-room to me.

"Nellie," he said, "the moon is shining as bright as day. Come out into the garden with me for a few moments, — I have something to tell you."

He did not wait for my consent, but threw a shawl around me and took me out.

"I gave her the flowers," he said after a brief silence.

"How did you manage to see her?" I asked.

"Don't be shocked, dear. I bribed one of the maid-servants to ask her to come down to the garden."

"Suppose she tells Mrs. Evans?" I said.

"I do not care. I am so glad I acted as I did. Poor child, her eyes were swollen with crying; only imagine how cruelly they served her! They never told her she was not coming until she was dressed, and then her aunt said she feared they would be too large a party to go from one house. I know how it was, — of course she looked too beautiful."

"That was it, Gerard; I saw it."

"She is a most loyal little creature. She never said a word against her aunt, and scolded me when I called her 'a mean scheming old woman.' Marion has had a miserable life all these years."

"I am sure of it."

"I have done my best to change it for her, Nellie. She looked so sad and so beautiful, her childish face covered with tears, that — I could not help it. — I kissed her and asked her to be my wife. Say you are pleased, darling, and then I shall be quite happy?"

"It is very sudden," I said, startled beyond measure.

"Not to me," he replied. "I don't mind telling you now, Nellie, but I have loved her from the first moment I saw her. I made up my mind then that, if she would have me, I would marry her. Say you are pleased?"

"Let me think it over first; I am not in love, and can judge calmly."

"I have plenty of money," he continued eagerly; "I can dispense with a fortune with a wife. Her father was a gentleman, and, as for her fine relatives here, I shall cut them all."

"She is so young; she really needs to go to school, rather than to be married."

"I know that, and I mean her to have good masters for a year or two, — but I intend to marry her first. You do not know, Nellie, what a sweet girl she is, nor how dearly I love her. Say you are pleased, or the happiest day of my life will be marred."

"I am pleased, Gerald," I said, "and I will do all I can to help you, for I love her myself almost as much as you do."

"Not quite," he remarked dryly. "There will be some fine scenes with Mrs. De Courcy Evans."

"You had better leave me to manage her, Gerald. I am sure that she can make things very disagreeable for you if she likes. It will be better to conciliate her."

"Do as you like; you have more patience and diplomacy than I have ever had. But, Nellie, she must know it at once. I will not have Marion made a prisoner in that absurd way."

I promised that I would go and see Mrs. Evans on the morrow and tell her all.

I did not sleep much that night. I half dreaded the coming interview. It was about noon when I called at No. 6. The Fates were not propitious. Mrs. Evans was engaged with some person on business. I saw the young ladies. They were, as usual, full of cordiality and friendship. If they had but known why I was there! I waited some little time, but I could not see Mrs. Evans. I bade the young ladies good-morning, resolving to call on the following day. When I reached the front door, I remembered that I had left my sun-shade in the drawing-room. I went back myself, intending to ask at what hour Mrs. Evans would be disengaged on the day following. Just as I reached the door I heard the elder sister say to the younger, —

"You will never succeed, Arabella, while that girl is in this house. Mamma must send her away."

I felt convinced the success meant Arabella winning my brother, and I smiled as I thought how soon the "girl" would be away from their house and mistress of mine.

Gerald was dreadfully impatient. I had great difficulty in keeping him from going that evening to No. 6. Nothing but my doleful prophesies of the dreadful confusion he would make of the whole business prevented him from doing so.

On the following morning I called again,

How little I thought what strange events that day would bring forth. I soon found that all was not as serene as usual at my next-door neighbor's. Mrs. Evans looked flushed and angry; the young ladies' faces wore an expression of something like gratified malice. I had evidently arrived in the midst of a "scene." I remember every detail of that morning call so well. The ormolu clock was chiming half-past twelve when I entered. I sat alone for some minutes. Miss Arabella joined me first, and then the others came in.

"I have had a very unpleasant duty to perform this morning, my dear Miss Fitzgerald," the elder lady began in a very lackadaisical voice. "I have been obliged to scold my niece very severely. I am afraid she is a most deceitful girl. There can be no greater fault in any one than deceit. I detest it."

"What has she been doing?" I asked.

"Only imagine!" said Miss Arabella. "I went quite accidentally into her room this morning, and I saw there one of the most magnificent bouquets I have ever beheld. I asked her where it came from, and she not only refused to inform me, but almost told me to mind my own business."

"I am afraid," chimed in Mrs. Evans, "that she will be just like her mother."

I had spoken the first few words of my reply, when the smart footman threw open the door and announced "Mr. Branscombe." I shall never forget the sensation that followed.

"Good Heavens," cried Mrs. Evans, losing all her dignity, "it is Marion's father!"

We all stood up, when a tall, stately gentleman entered the room, and, going up to the astonished ladies, saluted them cordially. He evidently thought his child had a happy home there.

"Where is Marion?" he cried. "I am so impatient to see her. Is she well?"

"You have not shown much impatience," said Mrs. Evans severely. "It is eleven years since you have inquired after her."

"That has not been all my fault," he replied; "I have been all over the world since then. I have written, but perhaps my letters have been lost. Where is she? I am longing to see her."

"You had better follow me then," said Mrs. Evans; "we have a visitor here, as you see."

She spoke crossly, and he looked at her

with some surprise. She made me a very elaborate apology and led the way to another room.

"Of all things in the world," cried Miss De Courcy Evans, "this is the strangest. Mamma has been scolding Marion all the morning, and her eyes are swollen with weeping."

"I hope to goodness," added her amiable sister, "that we shall not have to keep the father as well as the child: it begins to look like it."

"Mamma has more sense," rejoined her sister.

Then I withdrew.

I heard afterward every particular of the interview that followed between the father and his child.

Mrs. De Courcy Evans led the way into the dining-room.

"We did not part in a very friendly manner," said Mr. Branscombe. "There was a time when I believed you were unkind to my wife; but you have been good to my child. Let the past be forgotten. Tell me how I must repay you for your care of my motherless child."

Before Mrs. Evans had time to reply, Marion rushed into the room.

"O papa!" she cried; and the pain in her voice thrilled him.

She flung herself into his arms.

It was some minutes before he noticed the tear-stained face.

"My darling!" he cried, "what is the matter? Have you been unhappy?"

"It is nothing," she replied. "But, O papa! do tell me, — was my mother so very bad that I am to shun and dread being like her?"

His face grew dark.

"Who has been saying that to you, Marion?" he asked sternly. "Your mother was an angel, and I thank Heaven you are like her in the face. Who has dared to speak evil of your mother to you?"

"I have," said Mrs. Evans. "I had to reprove her this morning for being deceitful, and told her I feared, if she did not improve, that she would become as bad as her mother."

"You said that!" cried Mr. Branscombe, his voice thick with rage. "Then you are a cruel, shameless woman, to speak falsely of a dead mother to her child. — My poor Marion! you have had but a sad life, I fear, between a father who seemed to neglect

you, and these people who have not been kind to you."

She made no answer; but clung to him, and kissed his face.

Mrs. Evans took up her own defence. She expressed her opinion rather freely of Mr. Branscombe, of the poor wife who was not there to defend herself, and of Marion, whose youthful delinquencies were all remembered against her.

The matter ended in Mr. Branscombe's sending for a cab, and declaring that neither himself nor his child would remain another hour under her roof.

"I will arrange," he said to her at parting, "an interview with your husband, Mrs. Evans; and I will amply defray the expenses incurred during my child's residence with you."

He would not even allow the weeping Marion to say "good-by" to her cousins, saying, —

"They have spoken falsely of your mother, child; and you shall never see them again."

That evening, Mr. Evans returned home more excited than he had ever been seen to be before.

"This is good news, my dear, is it not?" was his greeting to his wife, who looked haughtier than ever.

"May I ask to what news you allude?" she replied, while her daughters looked on in amazement at their father's unusual liveliness.

"Why, have you not seen Branscombe? He came to my office this morning, and I sent him here."

"I must beg," said his wife, "that you will not mention that man's name to me again."

"Have you quarreled with him?" he asked, in amazement.

"I never quarrel, Mr. Evans. That man has insulted me, and I will not have his name mentioned in my house again, I tell you."

"It is a pity," said her husband, summoning a remnant of his fast-ebbing courage. "I am sorry for it; for he has come home to take possession of one of the finest fortunes and estates in England."

"What!" cried all three ladies at once.

"It is true, I assure you," replied the poor man. "Old Colonel Branscombe, who never acknowledged his son while living, is dead, and has left him Branscombe Park,

with a clear income of over six thousand per annum. He asked me if you could all go there this summer."

There was a pause of some moments. The ladies were too mortified to speak. But Mrs. De Courcy Evans rose to the occasion.

"Never was a woman tried as I am with the utter imbecility of those around me," she said. "No one is to blame but you, Mr. Evans. If you knew of all this, why did you not send a messenger to prepare me? Of course I should have received Marion's father very differently if I had known of this."

The poor husband listened in patient submission. He made no attempt at resistance or argument.

When Mrs. De Courcy Evans's vials of wrath had been emptied upon the head of her husband, she began to talk to her daughters.

"Mr. Branscombe certainly never will forgive us, mamma," said Arabella. "Marion has had no education. Only imagine Miss Branscombe of Branscombe Park unable to sing or play or dance!"

"She will be sure to marry well," put in the elder sister. "She is rather pretty, you know, at times."

"A wax-doll beauty!" said the mother contemptuously. "Mind, Arabella, when you see Miss Fitzgerald next, do not forget to mention that the gentleman I introduced her to so hurriedly was Mr. Branscombe of Branscombe Park."

On the morning following, I was not much surprised at receiving a note from Marion's father, asking permission to call on us that same day. Marion did not accompany him. We were charmed with him. He was not only a gentleman, but a scholar and a man of intellect. He seemed to have been everywhere, and to have seen everything. Marion had told him of what she had been pleased to call my great kindness to her, and he wished to thank me for it.

"She told me also," he continued, turning most unsuspectingly to Gerald, "that you had something to ask me, — some little favor that it lies in my power to grant. You have but to name it, Mr. Fitzgerald."

"It is very soon done, sir," replied Gerald, with a heightened color. "I love your daughter, and beg your permission to make her my wife."

I shall never forget Mr. Branscombe's look of amazement, nor his delight at his daughter's ingenuity. He had a long interview with Gerald, the result of which was that he gave his free consent to the marriage; but it was to be delayed for two years, while he took his daughter to Paris, and placed her under the tuition of the best masters.

"She has been cruelly neglected," he said to Gerald. "If she had not been fond of reading, she would have been perfectly ignorant. But I am greatly to blame."

He told Gerald the history of his wanderings. He said he had never been uneasy about his child, because he thought she was in a happy home. He told us how much he loved and admired her, and how far she exceeded even his wildest dreams of what his child would be like. He was much embittered against Mrs. Evans and her two daughters; but Gerald did his best to reconcile them, as he felt that Marion would not be perfectly happy if there was any discord.

I hardly knew Marion when I saw her next. She had been beautiful in her coarse, homely dress; but, now that her father had loaded her with all that was most costly, her beauty seemed to have acquired a fresh charm.

Mrs. Evans had no sooner recovered from one shock than she had to undergo another and almost greater, — the announcement of Marion's engagement to my brother. She was powerless to interfere; but she revenged herself upon me by congratulating me upon the advantages of being connected with her family, and by constantly saying, —

"What an excellent match it is for Mr. Fitzgerald!"

She was softened a little by the magnificence of the presents made to her by Mr. Branscombe.

Mr. Evans refused to receive any money from his brother-in-law, saying that Marion had been to him as a child of his own. In this matter, his wife made no attempt at overruling him, the value of the costly jewels presented to her and her daughters by Mr. Branscombe far exceeding the trifling expense poor Marion had been to them. Even to her father Marion never told what she had been obliged to suffer. To this day he is ignorant of the fact that his beautiful daughter, the heiress of Branscombe Park, is for some years waiting-maid to her

cousins. He blames himself for neglecting her; but she blames no one, and does not seem to remember that she was ever wronged by her relatives.

A kind of reconciliation was brought about. Mrs. De Courcy Evans apologized in very measured terms for the way in which she had spoken of Marion's mother, and peace was re-established.

Mr. Branscombe implored Gerald and myself to go with him when he went with his daughter to take possession of Branscombe Park. It was a glorious day,—one I shall never forget. The tenantry all met us in procession; and, if they admired the brave soldier who was to be master there henceforth, what must they have thought of the golden-haired Marion?

We spent three weeks at the Park; and then, true to his word, Mr. Branscombe took his daughter to Paris. During two years she corresponded regularly with Gerald; but her father would allow no interruption of her studies. She did not return to England during that time, nor did Gerald visit Paris.

As for Gerald, he nearly drove me wild with his impatience. He counted the days and weeks and months until the time came at last.

In the elegant and accomplished heiress of Branscombe Park none could have recognized the Cinderella of Alton Road. She retained her sweetness and simplicity, her warm, loving nature; but in all else she was changed. Marion Branscombe was fitted to be a duchess; but, by good fortune, she became my brother's wife.

The wedding was celebrated at the Park. Mr. Evans was invited; but Gerald and Mr. Branscombe flatly refused to invite the ladies.

However, Marlon gladdened their hearts by inviting them during the course of the summer; and they made themselves happy for months afterward by speaking of their "dear cousin, Mrs. Fitzgerald of Branscombe Park."

We all liked Mr. Evans; and I am sure his life was brighter and pleasanter after Marion's wedding. Seeing that other people treated him with marked consideration, his wife and daughters condescended to take more notice of him, and he no longer looks frightened when he enters his own house.

Gerald and Marion live at the Park. *I spend a great deal of my time there; but I still keep up the old house in Alton Road. My brother gave up his profession: he has quite enough to do to fulfill the duties of a country gentleman.*

The Misses De Courcy Evans are still unmarried. They never cease lamenting that they did not manage better as regarded Marion; as, if they visited much at the Park, they would therefore be certain to marry well.

Mrs. De Courcy Evans is as grand as ever, if not even grander; but she has learned a lesson, and in some way he has profited by it.

I am still, notwithstanding their disagreeable characteristics and false views of life, on pretty good terms with my next-door neighbors.

OUR STUPID BOAT-STEERER.

BY W. H. MACY.

When I shipped as mate of the "Maria Theresa," she was ready for sea, and nearly all her other officers, as well as the crew, were unknown to me until they mustered together on the day of sailing.

One of the boatsteerers, who answered to the name of Joe Meader, was a long-limbed, tawny fellow, evidently a semi-savage from some one of the isles of the South Sea; and in the course of my duties in getting the ship under way, making sail and stowing the anchors, I had discovered that this fellow understood very little English, and was by no means proficient in seamanship, as became the station which he occupied. I had occasion several times to speak sharply to him, when his stupidity had for the moment exhausted my patience; and when at last, after the ship was fairly out in the blue of the Atlantic, and the pilot was discharged, we went down to the supper-table, I asked Captain Taber. —

"Where did you pick up such a stupid fellow for a boat-steerer?"

"Which one do you mean?" he asked.

"Why, the Kanaka, Joe Meader. I hope I have n't judged him too hastily; but he acted to me like a regular blockhead."

The captain laughed.

"Why, that 's my boat-steerer. I shall take him in my boat, because I understand him, and he understands me better than he can any one else. In fact, he is my man; and he has sailed with me three voyages. He 'll never learn our tongue so as to talk it fluently; and he 'll never be an able seaman in the full sense of the word. But he is as brave as a lion; and, if you lay him alongside of a sperm-whale, he 's there."

"Indeed," said I, "I 'm glad to know that; for it 's worth something, in starting on a voyage, to have a boat-steerer who has been proved. And, if the fellow can do his duty in the head of a boat, we can overlook many drawbacks in other respects."

"Especially if he is a kind of favorite with the old man, I suppose you think," added Captain Taber, with another laugh. "By the way, Joe Meader is a queer corruption of the name given to him, which was Omega."

"Named after the ship he served in?" I inquired; "or was it because he was the last piece in the pot?"

"I 'll tell you the story of our early acquaintance when we are at leisure," said

he; "and you shall judge whether I have reason to believe in Omega, — ay, even to love him."

Later that evening the captain fulfilled his promise, and I was so much interested in the story that I think I can recall it very nearly as related by him.

I was second mate of the "Alpha," cruising in the low latitudes of the Pacific; and we were, at the time my story begins, steering away southward from the King Mill's group, intending to try our luck in the vicinity of Rotuma and about the Fijis. The lookout from the mast-head reported a sail in sight; but it was late in the afternoon, and only a light air stirring, so that it was nearly sundown before we made out that the sail flapping was that of a boat or canoe, and not of any larger vessel.

A boat was lowered, of which I was sent in charge; and, under the long and strong strokes of a fresh crew, we soon shot alongside of the strange craft.

She proved to be one of those swift but rickety canoes such as you have seen at the Groups, made of hundreds of little pieces of wood seized together with little lashings made of cocoanut-husks, carrying the usual outriggers, and possessing the usual "pump or sink" qualities of vessels of her class.

In this frail craft were two young men, who had evidently made a sea-voyage much longer than they had wished or intended at starting; for they were worn and emaciated by want of food and drink, and their lower limbs were so cramped from long confinement in one position that they had to be helped into the boat by my crew. When found by us, they had nothing to eat but a remnant of the flesh of a shark in a half-putrid state; and, for drink, they had a single cocoanut shell half full of water.

As the craft was of no earthly use to us, she was allowed to go adrift as soon as the men were taken out of her. A few strokes brought us again alongside of our approaching ship, where the poor fellows were taken on board and made comfortable.

With sufficient food and water, and room enough to move about, they soon revived wonderfully, and were able to give us some account of their adventures.

They came from the Island of Epemama, commonly known to whalers as Simpson's Island, and had started out to go to another island only thirty miles to the westward;

but, being overtaken by squally weather, they had lost their reckoning, and had drifted away with little or no idea of direction. According to their count, they had been out fifteen days when they were picked up; and even the sternest hearts among us were moved by their tears of joy at finding themselves on the comparative *terra firma* of a ship's deck, with plenty of water and food within their reach.

As we were not bound toward their native island, but to quite an opposite direction, of course the two Kanakas must remain with us, and become a part of our crew for a considerable length of time. They must have names of some sort; and the mate, by way of showing off his classics, proposed to christen them Damon and Pythias. Whereupon I suggested that Castor and Pollux would be an improvement. But the captain declared that one of them ought to be named after the ship; so of course Alpha and Omega would be exactly the thing.

Omega — who is now your stupid friend and shipmate, Joe Meader — was the taller of the two, and by far the better-looking; though you will say that there is ample room for improvement even in his beauty. But Alpha, who was short and thick-set, had a very sinister expression about him; in fact, was hideously ugly, both in the English and the American sense of the word.

Well, the two waifs were turned into the fore-castle among the crew, and were called upon like the rest for duty whenever they could be made useful. Omega fell to my lot as one of the starboard watch; and he proved so tractable and willing that I soon became greatly attached to him, though I cannot say that he was apt at learning seamanship. But I always had great patience with even a stupid man if he tried to do the best he could. Not so, however, with Captain Lucas, of the "Alpha;" for he was one of those small-souled, overbearing tyrants, who think it a brave act to tyrannize over any poor fellow who has no power to stand his own ground, or no intelligence to defend his own cause. These two poor islanders were fit subjects for his tyranny, and one of his chief delights consisted in bullying and abusing them. Poor Alpha, who was in the third mate's watch, fared the worse of the two, having no one to say a word in his favor; but I determined that my man, who always showed a willing and

an amiable disposition, should not be without a champion. Whenever I could so manage it, I kept him employed somewhere out of the captain's way. Whenever he was attacked and wronged, I defended him, even at the risk of always keeping myself in hot water with Captain Lucas. But I cared little for his enmity or his blustering, knowing that I could do my duty, and that, even if I left the "Alpha" at a Pacific port, I could easily get quite as good a berth in another ship.

Although our new shipmates were not at first assigned any places as oarsmen in the boats, I had occasion two or three times to take Omega with me in place of some one of my boat's crew temporarily off duty. I found him an excellent man for boat-service; he being full of courage, and anxious, as he ever was, to exert himself to the utmost. He was awkward at the oar, though a little practice would remedy that: but with the paddle in his grasp, and faced about toward the whales, he was the best man of the boat's crew; for he was quite in his element, and seemed like one inspired.

One day, on lowering, Captain Lucas found one of his crew sick, and took Omega as a substitute.

We were unsuccessful in our chase of the whales; and, when we returned on board, I observed that my Kanaka had his left eye closed and much swollen and discolored, as if from the effects of a very ugly blow.

Thinking the injury might be accidental, I innocently inquired of Captain Lucas, —

"What's the matter with Omega's face?"

"None of your prying business," he answered in a brutal tone.

"Oh, yes!" I retorted: "I suppose I understand what's the matter. I thought at first he might have been hurt by some accident."

"Well, you see it was no accident at all. If you must know, I cracked him over the head with a paddle, for his laziness; and I only wish I had split his skull, if there's any satisfaction to you. I'll have no sogering in my boat," he added, as if saying, by implication, that I did in mine.

"You did n't have any sogering on his part," said I, with some indignation; "for I know him better. I don't say that this poor green Kanaka is a sailor; but I'll swear that he's no soger."

"And I suppose you think," drawled the captain, with his most ironical smile, "that

he did n't deserve the crack he got over the eye?"

"'Think' is n't the word," I answered fiercely: "I know he did not."

"I'll be the judge in such cases; and you just keep your meddlesome tongue between your teeth, or I'll put your eye in mourning the same as I did your chum's there," he said.

Captain Lucas was now ready to boil over with rage; and, my mercury standing at the same temperature, I was quite as reckless of consequences.

"Meddlesome or not, I say that it was a cruel blow, — ay, cruel, and worthy of a coward."

Captain Lucas snatched a capstan-bar from the mizzen-mast, and swung for me.

I had laid my hand upon another one, but was too late.

His blow descended upon — not me, but my faithful Omega, who, quicker than thought, had interposed his own head to receive it.

By this time, the mate, who, as in duty bound, must support the authority of his superior, interfered, and called the boat-steerer to render unwilling aid; and I was disarmed, and ordered to go below, — off duty for the present.

I kept my own state-room; and, to all the captain's bluster and threats that night, I made no more reply than as if I had not heard him.

But the next day he was in a different mood, and I resolved that he should make the first approaches toward being reconciled, knowing that he could not long afford to lose my services in the midst of the whaling season. I would take no hint; but, at the end of three days, I went sulkily about my duty, in obedience to positive orders.

Meanwhile my poor savage was effectually disabled for some weeks, having one side of his head laid open by the capstan-bar. But he bore his sufferings with stoical patience, but seemingly with pride and delight, satisfied that he had shielded me; for he understood perfectly well the cause of my quarrel with my superior. I felt that I owed my life to his impulse of gratitude; for, if the terrible blow had been stopped by my skull instead of his, Captain Lucas would certainly have had murder upon his soul.

I continued to do my duty on board the "Alpha;" but my situation was anything

but a pleasant one. There was bad blood between the captain and myself, though it did not burst its bonds; the state of our feelings appearing only in the form of coolness and restraint toward each other. Indeed he seemed to take some pains to avoid any collision with me. While there was no change in his general abusive course toward others, Omega, after the episode, fared better than before; for, although Captain Lucas had no opportunity of hazing him with abusive language, and "working his old iron up" with disagreeable and menial jobs, he made use of no active violence. Whether the sight of the ugly scar on Omega's head, which you may have noticed today, had any terror for the conscience of Captain Lucas, I cannot say. But he seemed to be more severe than ever upon the poor fellow, Alpha, who was beaten and abused at any and all times, without the slightest provocation on his part.

In pursuing this course, the captain was stirring up a demon that he little thought of. All the ferocity of the rude savage, Alpha, was roused within him, and he burned with the one natural desire for final revenge. At such times as the captain was most abusive to him,—though he submitted, whether to blows of the fist or to a thrashing with a rope's-end,—there was a gleam in his eyes like that of the tiger. As his wild emotions agitated his stout though dwarfish frame, and flashed darkly across his features, Caliban himself could not have been more hideous in appearance.

Thus matters went on until the year rolled round, and we again turned our ship's head northward for another cruise among the low islands near the equator.

I had told Omega that we were nearing his home; but, grateful as was the news to his ears, his rapture seemed tempered with a feeling of regret at parting from me. He suggested what seemed to me the insane idea of my going ashore with him when we should arrive at Epemama, and either living always with him, or reshipping in some other vessel, where the commander would be more congenial to me. He seemed much affected at my rejection of this proposal, and for several days before we made the land he showed a desire to hover near my person, often looking at me as if he had something on his mind to say to me, yet never saying it. I did not notice this so much at the time; but it came to my mem-

ory in an exceedingly forcible manner afterward,

But the savage joy of our ship's ugly namesake when he had his native land plainly in sight had no drawback to its intensity. He made no noisy demonstrations; but I could see every fibre of his frame quiver with delight as we neared the island, and the fleet of canoes were seen coming out to meet us, under the impulse of their great leg-of-mutton sails. There were more than forty of them to be seen before the nearest one arrived alongside; and each of these contained four or five men, while some of them had also one or two women on board.

As soon as the ship was hove to, they crowded alongside, and the men swarmed on board until our deck was filled with them, driving a smart trade, chiefly in coconuts and mats, which they exchanged for bits of tobacco.

Alpha, still quivering with excitement, stripped off his clothing, which had been furnished to make a civilized man out of him, and mingled with the yelling crowd, at once transformed back again into the savage Epemaman. Not so with my man, who, although he exchanged hearty salutations with his old acquaintances, still retained the sailor's toga with a certain half-civilized dignity about him; and, as before, he remained near me wherever I went, but with his keen eyes ever directed upon the crowd where it was thickest. Many of the men were armed with short spears, made of coconut wood, with the edges at one end serrated by rows of shark's-teeth; and some carried heavy clubs. No precautions against treachery had been taken by Captain Lucas; and, mingled together as the natives and the ship's-crew were, I observed with some concern that nearly every one of our men was surrounded by a ring of the tawny barbarians. I looked over the side toward the coral reef, now within a mile of the ship, and saw that several canoes filled with women were quietly paddling away toward the shore.

Feeling this to be a dangerous omen, I was in the act of turning to speak a word of warning to Captain Lucas, himself surrounded by a large group of savages, when I was seized in a vise-like grasp, and half pushed, half carried toward the companion-way and down the stairs into the cabin. It was Omega who was my assailant; and, as

he forced me into the gangway, I saw his ugly comrade Alpha, with the expression of a demon on his face, deal a blow at his old enemy, the captain, nearly severing his head from his shoulders. Not with a rude, serrated spear was the murderous deed done, but with a far more effective weapon, — one of our own blubber-spades. I had just time to catch the dreadful sight in my eye; and then I was bundled down below, Omega closing the door and fastening it inside as he followed.

"Get gun, sir!" he cried impetuously. "Get gun! fight!"

There was no room at that moment for anything but action; not an instant to be wasted in thought upon the horrible tragedy going on above. The captain and mate were both killed, of course: they would be the first victims. The din and clamor overhead were perfectly terrific; for, before I had seized a gun which chanced to be ready loaded in my state-room, the fiendish rabble were in full possession of the upper-deck. We heard them bracing the main-yard to fill the topsail, and, looking up through the sky-light, could see that three or four of them had hold of the wheel, wrangling furiously, each pretending to know more than the others about steering the ship. The well-known voice of Alpha was heard trying to direct their operations, for he had picked up a little knowledge of seamanship during his year's experience, and he now appeared to be the master-spirit among his countrymen.

I had two faithful allies at my side, — my preserver, Omega; and the black steward, who chanced to be in the cabin at the moment the attack was made, and had thus escaped death. We made all haste to load more of the guns, including a pair of pistols which belonged to the mate, and which I knew where to lay hold of. But I confess I knew not what course I should pursue after we were well armed; for it would be madness to rush out among a hundred armed savages thirsting for our blood.

I told Omega and the steward that we must stay where we were, and wait for them to make the attack on us, when we would then sell our lives as dearly as we could.

"No come down here," said Omega decidedly. "No come. Epemama too much 'fraid gun."

This was true, and I ought to have

thought of what my savage friend had so well considered, making it the means of saving my life. His countrymen, except the very few who had "gone down to the sea in ships," had the most terrible dread of fire-arms as something quite beyond their comprehension. Cold steel they could understand, and make it a game for two to play at; but gunpowder and balls savored of the supernatural. They would not attack us in our stronghold; but would try to work the ship in, and run her ashore, where they could dispose of the few survivors at their leisure.

This, however, was no easy task to perform, unless the ship could be put under a press of sail, and then skillfully handled. She had been lying with her maintopsail aback, directly under the lee of the coral reef, in a perfectly safe position for our purpose; as the set of the current was sweeping her off-shore, and, the wind now dying away to a very light breeze, her drift would be considerable, even if well steered on a wind. But the savages were making wretched work of it; for we could see, from the window in the stern, what a crooked wake the vessel was leaving behind her, being now off several points free, and the next minute nearly aback, with all her canvas fluttering. As Omega understood their language, he knew that they were soon getting discouraged at their lack of success, and that, in spite of their efforts, the ship was going away from the island instead of nearing it.

I had heard the main hatch lifted off two or three times, and after a minute shut down again, as if those above were peering cautiously down; but it was drawing near sundown, and I knew that they would not risk coming down after the daylight was gone, such was their wholesome fear of the guns.

But a different noise now called my attention, — a gentle pounding on the door in the bulkhead between us and the after-hold, and a voice asking in English to be admitted.

The voice was recognized, and three of our crew jumped through the doorway, it being opened for the purpose, and as quickly secured again.

These three had been lucky enough to get down into the fore-castle, thus escaping the general massacre, and had crawled aft over the casks, between-decks, to join our

party in the cabin. One of these men had his arm broken by a blow from a club intended for his skull. But, thus re-enforced, I felt much stronger than before; for we mustered five able-bodied men beside the half-crippled one. There were two more, I supposed, at the mast-head, — one at the main, and one at the fore; but they would, for safety, stay where they were, and could not co-operate with us while the islanders held possession of the upper deck.

My faithful Omega, as soon as all the men were armed with loaded guns, suggested to me the line of tactics which I ought to pursue. The Babel of guttural voices overhead, a complete abomination to the rest of us, was quite intelligible to him, and his quick ear was ever open.

"No can get ship ashore," said he. "Ship all right go to leeward. Some men talk, leave ship, go ashore. Big Eree Rootara say stay all night. He all the same cap'n. Alpha say he wants to go ashore."

There was little in the ship that they cared for, except tobacco and cloth; and all this was below the deck, where they did not dare to venture.

Not even into the fore-castle would they put their heads after dark, though they might have done so with safety after our party was concentrated in the cabin. They would stay by the ship as long as Rootara, the leading chief, held his present mind; but I presume that Alpha cared less than his superior about running any risk of life to get possession of the vessel. He had accomplished his main object in wreaking his full vengeance upon the tyrant, Captain Lucas.

"Now," said Omega, "two man — good gun-man — stand here," placing me and Tom Dawes, one of the men from the fore-castle, where we could see obliquely up through the skylight. "Come dark now. Epemama man no see you."

We took our station in the darkness, selecting the best guns, and holding ourselves ready for decisive action at the proper moment.

"Want to kill two man," whispered Omega as coolly as if they had been two pigs instead of human beings, his own countrymen.

"Stand by when I tell you. Me touch you so."

We could see, even in the half-obscurity, the legs of the savages as from time to time

they walked back and forth past the skylight within range.

But Rootara was unknown to us, and I said as much to my preserver.

"Me tell you when Rootara comes," said the sharp-eyed fellow. "Got mark — fay — fay — one big leg, one small one. Keep still now."

Many dusky forms passed and repassed my line of vision outside the skylight, and two or three times I half raised my gun, thinking I had the right man; but my adviser silently put his hand upon it to restrain my haste.

At length I became tired, and lowered the weapon into one hand at my side; but just then Omega's eyes fairly flashed in the darkness as he reached over me, and touched the shoulder of Dawes, who was already in the act of taking aim. The flash and report followed instantly, and the stalwart form of Alpha dropped heavily to the deck. A yell of agony, blending with the noise of the fall, and a wailing cry, not unlike that of the croon at an Irish wake, swelled from a score of throats.

Then there was a general pattering of naked feet overhead, all moving rapidly aft.

"Keep close and still now," said Omega to me, "and be all ready."

Dawes had seized another gun, the next but one, and stood again prepared for a second shot. Meanwhile there was some fumbling at the door of the companion-way, as if the islanders were becoming desperate, and meant to attack us in our den. But it was well for them that they did not open the door; for the steward and another man stood at the foot of the stairs in the dark, with their cocked and loaded guns pointed upward.

There was much clamor now among the crowd, and apparently more diversity of opinion; for I could hear Omega chuckle as he listened. But as a peculiar uneven step was heard coming aft, while a voice, well known to him, thundered out some angry order to the stupid fellow at the helm, the lynx eyes snapped again, and a hand was laid lightly on my shoulder as a warning to be ready.

A pair of legs, sustaining a massive body, moved into my range of vision. They were hardly a pair, though, to speak correctly; for one was of ordinary size, as human legs run, while the other, in respect to circum-

ference, would certainly have filled a deck-bucket.

"Now," said Omega; and I needed no second call.

My bullet passed upward through the head of Rootara, and the great sun of Epemama had set forever.

"Go on deck now," said the impassive Omega, as if the whole business were now settled. "Kanakan all go now. Kill big Eree: no fight no more."

He understood his countrymen well; for never was a sinking ship deserted by rats more quickly than was ours by these barbarians when the fall of their chieftain was known. Their horrible cries still ring in my ears whenever I recall the events of that night.

We threw open the cabin doors, and sailed forth into the moonlight just in time to see the last of them rush overboard, caring not for the moment whether they dropped into a canoe or into the sea; for these people, in their native tropical waters, are quite as amphibious as are so many seals or otters.

We had only to put the helm hard up, and, the ship's head falling off, we soon put a convenient distance between us and the frightened Epemamans. They had taken the bodies of Rootara and Alpha with them when they fled the field, and they had also previously thrown overboard all our slaughtered shipmates, and washed down the deck. No damage had been done, beyond the theft of some few portable articles from above-deck.

Including the two who had remained at the mast-head, we mustered eight men, all told, as the remnant of the ship's crew. Of course, I, as the superior officer, took charge and, thus short-handed, steered away for Manilla, where more men were shipped; and, after another very successful cruise, I took the "Alpha" home to her owners with a full cargo of oil.

You may judge now, if you can, what my feeling must be toward the man who has thus twice saved my life,—once from the blow of the capstan-bar, which left the strange scar on his head, and which would have killed me; and again from the murderous hand of his own countrymen, when he might very naturally have joined with them in capturing the ship, and killing the entire crew. But he deliberately chose for himself the part he would act, even though he saw great risk of his life by so doing; for his own people would have shown him no mercy had they succeeded in running the ship on the coral reef, in accordance with their designs.

Omega has never expressed any wish to revisit Epemama, thinking no doubt that his chance of life would not be worth a single head of tobacco if he should land there. He has told me that he had an old grudge against the chief, Rootara, and wished to see him killed, especially by my hand. He has sailed with me two voyages as boat-steerer, the tie of affection between us being more strong than ever; and it shall never be from word of mine that we part company.

OUR TWO POLLYS.

Bigelow, Elizabeth

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Mar 1877; 45, 3; American Periodicals
pg. 291

OUR TWO POLLYS.

BY ELIZABETH BIGELOW.

"PLEASE, ma'am, Mr. Leighton said I could stay and do chores, ma'am!"

We all looked in speechless wonder at the funny little figure that stood in the doorway, evidently just emptied, bandbox and all, out of Uncle John's sleigh.

It was a girl of not more than thirteen, probably, but with such an old and grave little face, that you couldn't help feeling, as Kitty remarked, "as if she were her own grandmother!" She had a very grand-

motherly bonnet on, too, purple in color, and coming so far over her face that only a mass of tow-colored hair was to be seen beneath it; the outside was adorned with a very dilapidated black feather, and a bunch of purple glass grapes, and the inside with three large purple roses. She had on a very thin cotton shawl (though it was January, and exceedingly cold), which had once evidently been a bright green, but was now happily considerably faded. Her dress was

a bright red calico, of a very striking palm-leaf pattern, and stiffly, rustlingly new. Her baggage consisted of a very large and very dilapidated bandbox, around which she had both arms tightly clasped, as if she expected that some effort would be made to take it away from her.

"Where did you come from, child?" asked Aunt Elsie.

"From ole Miss Bettinson's, last, but she didn't use me well, and she said I didn't pay for my keep, and maybe I didn't, though the keep was dretful poor, and I worked like a bear! I can work like a bear, and I'm willin', too, I be. I'm a town pauper, you know; that's how I come to be at ole Miss Bettinson's; she took me out of the poorhouse. An' I was again back to the poorhouse, when Mr. Leighton he come along, an' said I could go home with him!"

"That's just like John!" said grandma; and though the tone was not exactly approving, she looked as if she were proud of "John."

"I don't know what Keturah will say to another one!" said Aunt Elsie. "She declares that Hetty is of no sort of use, and that she can do all the work herself—but there, child! come up to the fire and warm yourself! You must be nearly frozen with that thin shawl on!"

"It is kinder cold, but aint it a beauty?" said the child, gazing fondly at it as she took it off and folded it carefully. "Ole crazy Miss Fordham, at the poorhouse, giv it to me for pickin' cranberries for her; she liked to string 'em and rig herself all up in 'em. They say she was dretful rich, and used to go to parties once; and she's always a pretendin' she's going to one now. But they wont let her have the cranberries unless she hides 'em. Miss Bumpus she says it's wasteful. The bunnit I got from Miss Bettinson; do you think it's a pretty bunnit? She said I could have an afternoon a week to pick berries last summer, so's to buy me a bunnit to wear to meetin'; but when I got the money, she took it and giv me this. She means well, Miss Bettinson does, they say, but she used to lick me awful. I s'pose I be tryin'. An' town paupers can't expect much. Can I stay here, ma'am? Mr. Leighton he said I could, an' I'm real smart to work, true as you're born I be, ma'am!"

"Stay! stay! Polly says stay!" piped a shrill voice, so suddenly that we all started,

though we knew well enough that it was only Poll, Aunt Katherine's parrot, who had a word to say on almost all subjects. But the new-comer was evidently unaccustomed to parrots. She started to her feet, letting her precious bandbox roll almost in the great open fire, and looked in fear and amazement from one to another. She seemed to decide that one of the children was trying to tease her, though Johnny was deeply engaged in mending his skate-strap, and Floss was winding a skein of yarn for grandma, with a very serious face.

"It was only the parrot, child," said Aunt Elsie, seeing how distressed she was.

"O my good gracious! I never heard a bird talk! Miss Peabody she told me a story about a singin' tree an' a talkin' bird, but I thought, be sure, 'twas a lie! But how did he know my name when I aint told it!"

And she arose, and stood in front of Poll's cage, gazing at him with awe and admiration.

"Pretty Polly! Pretty Polly!" screamed the parrot.

"La!" exclaimed the child, coloring brightly, "that's the first compliment I ever got! I aint pretty, be I?"

I looked at the clear blue eyes, and the pretty pink-tinted cheeks, and wanted to say "yes," but grandma answered, primly:

"Handsome is that handsome does! If you are a good girl we shall think you pretty! But the parrot means that she is pretty; parrots are always called Polly. Is your name Polly?"

"Yes, ma'am, Polly Slocum. We used to live in the little brown house down by Beaver Run, and was as snug as could be; but father he got killed—a tree fell on him when he was cuttin' wood—and then mother she took on so that she jest kinder pined away, and died; and Nat was away to sea—Nat was my big brother—and we never heard from him, so I had to go to the poorhouse. I hope I aint a goin' back there, though it is some better than Miss Bettinson's, for the boys call me town pauper, and Miss Bumpus she's most awful cross. She's a clever woman, I expect, but you see she don't want so many round. There's plenty to do the work there besides me. It kinder seems to me as if nobody didn't want me, anywhere! Nobody ever said 'stay' real kind of hearty to me but jest that bird!"

"Stay! stay! Polly says stay!" cried the parrot.

Aunt Elsie's tender heart was touched by the child's pitiful little story.

"We will all say stay to you here, my child!" she said, putting her arm around her, and stroking the tow-colored locks back from her high white forehead. "And nobody here will be cross to you. Keturah has a way of speaking a little sharply, but she will be good to you if you try to please her!"

"I will, you bet. I will!" exclaimed our new Polly. (While grandma looked horrified, and the parrot, delighted at a new word, repeated, chuckling, "You bet I will!") "And I can work like a bear!—you better just try me, if you don't believe me!"

"Beth, you had better show her to her room, so she can put away her things," said Aunt Elsie. "She can have the little squirrel chamber, next to Keturah's."

Polly took up her big bandbox, and her shawl and bonnet, and followed me.

The "squirrel chamber" derived its name from its paper. The groundwork was a light blue, with now and then a brown tree bough, on which sat a bright yellow squirrel, busily engaged in cracking nuts. It was very gay, and took Polly's fancy at once. The room was very plainly but neatly furnished.

"I expect this room is too good for a town pauper, don't you? Be I a goin' to have it all to myself? Well, that's nice! I expect you are real nice kind of folks. I like you real well. That old lady down there has got a dimon ring on, aint she? I expect you could sell a dimon ring and get a real lot of money for it, couldn't you? This is the very beautifullest paper that ever I see! I don't expect Victory has got any much prettier, do you?"

And that was the way in which our second Polly became an inmate of our house.

Our first Polly had come years before. It had been given to Aunt Katherine by her lover, who was a sea captain. When Aunt Katharine was left a widow, she brought Polly home with her; and Polly was a privileged member of the family. She was let out of her cage for an hour or two every day, and hopped all over the house, at her own sweet will.

She had entirely forgotten the slang taught her by the sailors on her voyage from her tropical home, but, I am sorry to

say, that Johnny and his friends had taught her some phrases which she sometimes made use of with singular aptness. Indeed, I never could quite believe that Polly's conversation was all mimicry; there seemed to me to be shrewd keen brains stowed away in that gay green poll of hers. How else could one account for her perching on the back of the minister's chair, when he came to court Aunt Katharine, and, as soon as his conversation took a tender tone, requesting him to "dry up, old boy! dry up!" Or for her crying out "Too thin!" when Johnny said he wanted a quarter to put in the contribution box? I think there were times when Johnny heartily wished that he never had taught that remarkable bird any slang.

Our two Pollys were fast friends from the first. The parrot was rather capricious in her likes and dislikes, and, we thought, a trifle aristocratic in her ideas, as she never would allow Keturah or Hetty, our two servants, to come near her; but if she had such prejudices, she waived them in Polly's favor. Perhaps the awe and admiration with which the girl regarded her was understood by the parrot. Polly seemed to think a talking bird must have stepped straight out of the *Arabian Nights*, and she was never tired of looking at and listening to her.

Keturah was the only one in the house who did not become fond of our new Polly at once, and Keturah would have liked her if she had not set her face like a flint against having any more "help" about the house; she was blessed with great strength, as well as a "faculty," and wanted to do all the housework herself; "then things wasn't every which way," as she expressed it. But even Keturah was sufficiently won over at the end of a week to say that she was "glad Mr. Leighton took the child out of that old Miss Bettinson's clutches, for everybody knew that she was a case."

Our new Polly's chief failing seemed to be a love of finery. She had a perfect passion for gay colors, and for jewelry. She expressed her disapprobation freely if anybody appeared in a dark-hued dress, and inquired, several times, if I had not "money enough to buy me a bigger bosom pin." She was the happy possessor of a brass one, as large round as a teacup, which she had bought of a peddler with money earned by picking berries. Grandma gave her some

gay ribbons, which she had kept stored away for many a year, and she made them into bows for her dress and hair, and when she was "dressed up" no rainbow could vie with her.

Alas! it was this very love of finery that brought her hour of trial and sorrow to our Polly.

Grandma came into the sitting-room one afternoon, with such a look of consternation on her peaceful old face as I had never seen before.

"Elsie! Katharine! children, all of you look! I have lost my diamond ring!"

That diamond ring I think grandma prized above all her earthly possessions, for it had been her betrothal ring, given her by the young husband who had died within three years from their wedding day.

"I was sure that I put it on, this morning, as I always do!" said grandma. "But I discovered that it wasn't on my finger, and I went up stairs to see if it was on my dressing-table, and it wasn't! I have searched my room thoroughly, and it isn't there!"

Grandma's distress was pitiful to see. We all searched in every nook and corner, where we thought it possible for the ring to be, in vain.

"Elsie, do you think it possible it could have been stolen?" said grandma, at last.

"Stolen! stolen! ha! ha!" chuckled the parrot.

"Surely there is nobody in the house who would steal!" said Aunt Elsie.

Keturah and Hetty were summoned to assist in the search. Polly had been sent on an errand to the village.

Hetty dropped, trembling, into a chair as soon as she heard what had happened.

"O, I promised, sure as the meetun house not to tell, but I 'spose I'd ought to! I 'spose I'll have to, now!"

"If you know anything about the ring you must tell, Hetty, certainly," said Aunt Elsie.

"When Polly was a sewin' up in her room yesterday, I went in suddenly, and I see somethin' a-listenin' on her hand. And says I, Polly what's that? And she covered her hand up quick, and didn't want to tell me, but when she see I knew 'twas a ring she up and told me that she had a diamond ring that was give to her, and for me never to tell, but she wouldn't show it to me!"

An utter silence followed Hetty's revelation.

Keturah was the first to break it.

"Well, it's nothin' more'n I expected!" said she, grimly.

"I don't believe Polly stole it! I never will believe it!" cried Aunt Elsie. "If there's anything in faces that child is honest!"

"Honest! honest!" heartily repeated Poll.

"But circumstances do look very much against her, Elsie!" said grandma. "Though I find it hard, still I must believe that she is the thief!"

"Thief yourself!" screamed Poll, from her perch.

Aunt Elsie sent Keturah and Hetty back to the kitchen, and we all awaited Polly's return with the greatest anxiety. Aunt Katharine proposed searching her things for the missing ring, but Aunt Elsie would not consent to it. "I want to hear what the child has to say for herself first," she said.

It was wonderful to see with what faith Polly had inspired Aunt Elsie, who was one of the most practical and sensible of women!

When Polly appeared, with the happy beaming face which she always wore now—very different from the careworn one which she had brought from old Mis' Bettinson's—Aunt Elsie asked her, at once, if she had a diamond ring.

Polly colored and looked distressed.

"O my—did she tell? Well I can't help puttin' it on sometimes when I'm alone, it sparkles so nice! Yes, ma'am, I have got one; it was give to me; but I promised never to show it to anybody, nor to tell who give it to me!"

We looked at each other. Who would be at all likely to give Polly a diamond ring? Such gems were not to be found at the poor-house, certainly, nor at Mrs. Bettinson's, and Polly's own parents had been but a little above want.

"Polly," said grandma, severely, "I have lost my diamond ring, and I want to see the one you have!"

Poor Polly looked incredulously from one to the other, and then burst into tears.

"O my! O my! does she think I took her ring? Ole Mis Bettinson she said I was lazy and shiftless, but she never said I stole! Nobody ever said I stole, before! O, I didn't! I didn't!"

"Polly didn't! Polly didn't!" screamed the parrot, beginning to manifest the great-

est excitement, and trying furiously to get out of his cage.

"I don't think you stole it, Polly," said Aunt Elsie, gently. "But you will surely let us see your ring!"

Polly dried her eyes, and sat up very straight.

"I couldn't, ma'am," she said, doggedly. "I promised solemn, and I couldn't!"

"There!" said grandma. "Doesn't that look as if she were guilty?"

"Guilty yourself!" screamed Poll, renewing her attempts to get out.

"Polly, I must insist on your showing the ring!" said Aunt Elsie, firmly.

"You've been dretful good to me, ma'am, and all of you, and I wish, O I wish I'd never took the ring, nor promised! But I can't show it, and I'll just pick up my things and go back to the poorhouse, or to jail if I've got to. It's been just like heaven here, and I was a thinkin', last night, was too glad to last!"

"Wait a moment, Polly," said Aunt Elsie. "If you have promised not to show your ring I think when so much depends upon it you might be justified in breaking your promise. Grandma's ring is lost—"

"Buried! buried!" shrieked Poll, dolefully.

Aunt Katharine sprang forward.

"I do believe that parrot knows something about the ring! He never would act so for nothing!" she said. And she opened the door of Poll's cage.

Poll hopped out, chattering unintelligibly, and chuckling, hopped along to the fireplace, poked his beak into the ashes, and drew up—grandma's diamond ring.

"Bless me!" said grandma. "I must have dropped it off my finger when I had my nap, this morning. I noticed that it was getting loose!"

"Hal hal Thief yourself!" chuckled Poll.

Is it too much to say that that parrot has brains?

It seemed as if grandma couldn't do enough to make amends to Polly for her unjust suspicion; and Polly's happiness was something touching to witness.

Grandma sent to Boston for a dress pattern of the richest and gayest plaid, for Polly, and had Miss Snipwell, the village dressmaker, make it in the latest fashion. And Polly, not content with displaying it at church and singing school, made a call at the poorhouse, and Mrs. Bettinson's, attended in it.

Nobody mentioned her diamond ring to Polly, nor did she allude to it, in any way, until three months after, poor crazy Miss Fordham at the poorhouse who was said to have been a belle and beauty in her day, died suddenly.

Then Polly brought forth her diamond ring. Miss Fordham had given it to her, having carefully concealed it herself lest the town should take possession of and sell it, first making Polly solemnly promise not to let anybody see it while she lived. A little while ago Polly's cup of joy fairly ran over. Her brother Nat came home from sea, a fine manly honest sailor, and brought her a whole chest full of finery.

He says that after his next voyage he is going to turn landsman, buy a snug little farm, and have Polly for his housekeeper.

But I don't see how we could spare Polly.

Every time the subject is mentioned the parrot screams, as he did on the day of Polly's coming:

"Stay! stay! Polly says stay!"

And our two Pollys are friends who would stand by each other to the last gasp.

OUR WEEK.

BY FIDE.

WE were not born with the proverbial "silver spoon," being hard-working farm-boys, aged respectively, Tom, your humble servant, eighteen; Dick, seventeen; Harry, sixteen.

Our heights were like steps; my red top-knot looming conspicuously over Dick's brown curls, and the latter shining aloof in chestnut contrast with Harry's close-cropped flax.

It came about, one day, that our parents arrived at the time-honored conclusion that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy;" the result forthwith presenting itself in the shape of a warranted permission to spend a week's vacation at any place within the line of our many relations.

We hurrahd with delight at this welcome verdict, and, circling around our good *mater*, grew deep in questions regarding with which of our near or distant kindred we should cast our lot, when, quite to our surprise, a lady walked into our midst without ceremony, and throwing up a heavy lace veil, kissed mother's cheek with a loud smack, and shook hands and talked with father over the auld-lang-syne days.

This was Aunt Bawn, the joy of all our hearts. The rosy light of her face was enough to inspire us with a fixed resolution. So when everything had calmed down, Dick just stepped up to her side and broached in this fashion:—

"Listen to me, aunt; you never saw such desperadoes as Tom and Harry, there."

"How so, dear?" exclaimed that good lady, with alacrity.

"Why, at this very moment," he persisted, "they are engaged in planning against you."

"Dear me!"

"Oh, it is a settled thing; they are going to storm your castle and take up quarters there as honored guests for a week, at least!"

Aunt Bawn drew a breath of relief, and her face became dimpled with smiles of amusement.

"And of course," continued Dick with the air of a martyr, "I will have to keep them company as a sort of guardian angel, or wild-animal tamer. You can put me on one of the pantry shelves to keep watch over the pies and things."

Aunt Bawn settled back in her seat with a complacent look, and sent us off to dress, and, as we rather slowly arrived at the top

of the stairs, a sort of postscript reached us in the shape of, —

"In haste, boys, in haste!"

Once within the walls of our room, we turned our faces blankly toward each other, and burst into something like a half laugh, half murmur.

"To dress," meant in our case no fastidious broadcloth in reserve, no natty little hat of fashion, but simply—a thorough brushing.

Whether Aunt Bawn would be satisfied to take us to the "Briars," in our complication of patches and darns and outrageous cowhides, was a question, which, until now, had been good enough not to trouble us. However, after a dismal dialogue and much doubting, we began to "dress."

Harry straightened up with head erect and arms down, and cried, "Fire away, Dick!" whereupon the latter proceeded to scour him violently with the brush, while I, in a distant corner, plied fast at my cowhides, in vain efforts to get a shine on them.

After revolving before each other in our turn, and undergoing the same cleansing operation, we descended single file.

"What! not dressed yet, boys!" was the exclamation which met us as Aunt Bawn ran her careful eye over our toilet.

After all our hard labor and panting behind the scenes, this was rather a discouraging greeting.

Mother said something about farm-boys being pretty careless regarding the fashions, and father fingered his wallet and asked the *mater* how clothing was sold at the Beehive.

Aunt Bawn looked at her watch, gave her eye a thoughtful cast upward, as if calculating, had considerable side talk with the *pater familias*, and protestations, *sotto voce*, from the *mater*, and the next moment, after saying, "Well, good-by, boys; you are not ready for a visit this time, I see," took her leave.

We could scarcely credit our own senses. Simultaneously we rushed to the window. Sure enough; there she was, walking down the street so rapidly that we could scarcely catch sight of her.

I tried to cheer up and forget the matter, and make the rest also forget it; so I argued and proved and declared. But I might as well have talked to so many insensate statues, for all the notice my rally received;

so I left the scene and strolled to the very farthest edge of the farm, and sat there in sheer despair, when, after musing lugubriously a half-hour or more, a figure suddenly loomed before me, clad in a long cloak and trailing skirts, and the face muffled to the ears.

I started back and gazed in silence at my intruder, who, raising one hand high in air, said, in tones quite awful, —

"Worldling, I come to open to your earthly eye the pages written of you by fate! Cross my palm with silver." And a brown hand was thrust under my nose, while I made vain efforts to call to mind whether I had seen any gypsy camps in the neighborhood.

However, on recovering somewhat, I simply replied with a wave of the hand, —

"Go away, old lady!" —

"Gypsy Queen!" interrupted the figure peremptorily.

"Well, then, go away, Gypsy Queen," I grumbled. "I can't endure any nonsense just now!"

"Hoot!" she said, indulging in an owl-like screech that fairly startled my senses. "Discontented fault-finder, a horsewhip should be your portion instead of this grand make-up of broadcloth I see in store for you; haste homeward! see what there awaits you!"

And giving my ears a maddening pull, the gaunt apparition was about to stalk off, but her trail! oh, her trail!

It tangled and wound itself mischievously around her feet, and propelled her forward in a way that made me roar with laughter spite of the strange impressions haunting me.

When again well balanced on her feet, she pointed mysteriously upward, and, quite mortal-like, was about to climb over an adjacent stone wall, when, by way of putting an explanation on the drama, a cowhide boot projected conspicuously from beneath her skirts, and put me forcibly in mind of one I had seen on that honored relation named Dick. Of course I caught fast hold of it, and, after fruitless efforts to get free, my gypsy threw off disguise in a laughing shout of, —

"Oh, come! let go, Tom! don't keep a fellow trapped all day!"

"Not so fast!" I exclaimed. "I believe I have to settle a certain ear-pulling account before I can award you an honorable discharge, sir." And though he bravely struggled for freedom, I still held my prisoner, until a second cry of, "Aunt Bawn is waiting for us at the house with new suits, old boy!" induced me to smoke the pipe of peace, and in three minutes afterward this brother, so fond of gypsying, with Harry and myself, received, at the hands of this good aunt,

outfits elegant enough to grace the form of a king.

Had she been uncle instead of aunt, we would have paraded her on our shoulders in high triumph through the house; but instead we were forced to confine our feelings to simple words which seemed to fall so far short of our heart's sentiments that we felt like dunces while uttering them.

"On account of this delay," was the smiling rejoinder to all our overtures, "we will have to take quite a late train; you can carry my waterproof." And she handed me the cloak in question, which I, glorying in the opportunity to make myself useful, strapped up and slung over my shoulder, traveler fashion. All her shopping paraphernalia she gave to Dick, and to Harry's sage protection fell the care of her pretty silk umbrella of myrtle green.

As we strolled down to the depot, the hush of twilight had fallen over the earth, the world seeming to wear a calm, still look, as if listening; and through the gray quiet came parting flashes from old Sol, that emblazoned turrets and windows in grand style; little birds, too, trooped through the sky, in a whispering sort of way, with scarce a rustle of the wing; and all around the wonderful horizon the trees branched up, shadowy and motionless against the sky, looking as if they touched its soft gray plain, and were communing with it.

We reached the station at last, and soon found ourselves in the cars. The engine shrieked, the train shot out from under the dark shadow of the depot, and our journey to Barberry Briar really and truly began.

It was late when we at last reached our stopping place. Dark clouds were scudding across the already dark sky, and not a star in all the black expanse of firmament to be seen.

We stood in a shadowy group on the platform, waiting for Aunt Bawn to take action. Pretty soon a tall narrow cab swayed and rumbled around an end of the depot. The next instant we crowded into it, and over the hills it bore us at a rash, rattling rate that made Aunt Bawn rise more than once from her seat to shake the door and cry up to the driver, —

"Softly, there, Barstowe, we're not going to a fire!"

After which timely interference we would have a spell of even motion, when the wheels would roll methodically comfortable, like something that had a nineteenth-century finish, and then, as if tired of their gentility, would give a most abominable lurch, that would send us all sprawling against each other's noses, and dash away reckless as bedlam.

"Who is Barstowe?" ventured Harry, in a half-threatening voice, after having under-

gone the third emphatic bang against the side of the misguided vehicle.

"The worthiest man in all Barberry," said Aunt Bawn promptly. "He has been my coachman for eleven years."

Then with a sudden check we came to a dead halt. The old cab and nag, and even Barstowe himself, seemed to be wholly incapable of ever again showing signs of progress, when, to our relief, Aunt Bawn quietly stepped out, saying,—

"Barberry Briar, at last."

We hurried out after her, stepping on each other's heels in our eagerness, when the first sight that met our eyes was a comfortable light streaming from a lantern that swung hospitably before the porch, of a pillared mansion over which the fitful light threw checkered gleams disclosing the strong dark ivy that clammers in struggling luxuriance up the white, broad front.

This was where Aunt Bawn had lived from her birth. A grand old house it was; the windows were numerous, and had a multitude of tiny narrow squares; the broad sashes painted brown, and draped with sombre cretonne curtains, that comfortably modified the vacant glare of the white ones. There was an alcove window festooned with heavy damask lined with dark blue embossed satin, and drawn back with heavy bronzed tassels. Underneath floated softly a curtain of lace of so fine a texture it seemed like something spider woven. Birds sang from almost every corner, and ivies climbed from vases around statues and mirrors, and held daintily open medallion covers from their smiling pictures.

Aunt Bawn came eagerly to us now, after having changed her traveling dress, and bustled us into the supper-room, where she declared to Pon, the little negro girl in attendance, that "the young gentlemen, Master Tom, Dick, and Harry, had come to Barberry in search of something worth seeing;" adding, "Does Pon think they will see it?"

Pon shrugged up one shoulder, displayed a beautiful row of ivories, glanced sideways at us, and lisped out with a very demure courtesy,—

"Deed, missus, yes."

"Oh!" Aunt Bawn said as she passed us the cream, "and perhaps you can tell us where they can see it."

Pon laughed with an explosive titter, answering brokenly,—

"In—in de lookin'-glass missus," and vanished triumphantly with the tray, her eyes rolling gleefully back at us till nothing could be seen but the whites of them.

This was how our first evening at the "Briar" began.

The following evening was spent in wreathing evergreens for Christmas, and

when morning came Aunt Bawn broke in upon us, saying,—

"My dear boys!"

We gathered earnestly around her.

"I am going to be absent for a day or two," she said, "and now, boys, humor me in a whim, by answering, according to your own judgment, whatever letters may come for me, until my return; and, let me add, whoever acquits himself best of this duty shall be awarded with the prize of education at the first college in the country."

The next instant she was gone.

We stared blankly at each other. Could a stranger proposal have been made? In the event of our disagreeing, how must the recipient of our answers feel?

Bewildered, of course, and suspicious, too, that they were being made a jest of. But the wish was Aunt Bawn's, and if there was anything singular about the matter, she knew the reason why; and our duty, we concluded, was to strive for the prize, and forget the absurdity.

The day waned, and the sun went down, finding us congratulating each other and wishing for the test, when a dainty missive was brought in by Pon.

Scarcely glancing at the directions, I tore it open. It read as follows:—

"MRS. BAWN, — *My Dear Madam*: — I am, in my manifold sorrows, driven to open my heart to you; you knew me when wealth was at my command, when society, of the most brilliant caste, flocked around me, scattering their praises and attentions in offering. You knew me when my lot seemed an earthly paradise with no wish unanswered. My wealth—where is it? Taken from me as it came, like a bright vision that turns into an oppressing nightmare; like an illumining star swallowed in a sudden abyss of cloud. I, too, am in the cloud, with no light to cheer, or show me the way. I am groping for some foothold. The world flies from me, I am an outcast in the dust; no hand reaches to mine, no home offers Magdalene a hearth; I am a burden, it seems, on the very earth itself; I am lost! Terrible word! It seems to hover in the air about me, making my poor, seared heart creep with despair. Ah, if I could sit at your feet, and look up at your eyes of charity, and hear some endearing word from your lips of truth. May I, may I come?"

"ANNA BERGINE."

Beneath this was a postscript, saying that on the following morning the writer would be at the depot at ten, where she would wait in prayerful hope of being received.

Scarcely had we finished reading and commenting on this strange epistle, when Pon hurried in with another letter, saying that

she had overlooked it,—the substance of which was,—

"MY DEAREST FRIEND, MRS. BAWN:— I am tired of wealth and fashion, and have made up my mind in real earnest to pay you a visit. It seems in this society, one can hardly belong to themselves; so I am going to take revenge on my gay life, you see, and run away from it. I think if I had privations to contend with, or something of earnest work to pursue, or if I had just two dresses, with the luxury of wondering where the next one was to come from, I would be at a wholesome climax; but so much of the superfluous is crowded into my life, that it is a burden to grope one's way through it all, and wear a victorious face. Methinks I hear you say 'tis an easy matter for me to cast all this trouble to the winds, by dividing my loaf, even; half for my poorer brother, half for myself, see. That would simply be the singeing of your heart and the ruination of mine; for, after all, what would the world be to me without position? Think you I could outlive the ordeal of having my poor soaring wings clipped, and, while I delved with the needy ones, look up from my lonely lot to the heights I had left, and see the golden money locks shake a grave 'No,' in response to my sighs? Again, I hear your sarcastic echo of 'heights!' as if greater heights were not in the honest tear of poverty, or the honest principle that would famish on a pittance rather than flourish in the luxury of ill-acquired pelf. Ah, well I know your sentiments; they flit through my brain like chastisements; but know you, dear one, for rich or poor, mortality has not that boon called contentment. For the soul was made for heaven, and nothing but heaven can fill it. Write when you will be ready to receive me, and believe me, yours, by every name endearing.

"KATHLEEN REGENT."

Both letters were dated from Barberry, and the answers to be sent to Barberry postoffice. This was strange, too, but nevertheless we consulted over the matter, and decided that Mrs. Nipps, the housekeeper, must be told at once to have rooms prepared.

So to Mrs. Nipps I sped.

That lady was making a raid with the broom on imaginary cobwebs. It was almost twilight.

"Mrs. Nipps, said I, in quite a business heat, "you are to prepare two rooms, quickly as possible. We are to have two lady visitors, — one in the morning; the other, perhaps, tomorrow night."

Her hands dropped to her side, and the broom had a vacation.

"Two lady visitors!" she gasped.

"Yes," I said, "that is certain."

"Whar you gwine to put 'em?" rolling her eyes at me in a terrible way.

Before I answered again, I could almost imagine she wore horns.

"Why — why of course," I blundered, "there must be a place to put them."

"Must!" she said, her voice ascending to a sharp falsetto, "p'rhaps you 'll build on an L or sumfin'?"

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Nipps," I said, really mystified.

"Well, I understand myself, dat's one consolation you young gemmen don't seem to possess," she coolly remarked, and again caught up her broom.

"But," I reasoned, "it must be because there is n't room enough then: do tell me at once, Mrs. Nipps."

"Heh?" she answered with an up-toss of her bandanna, "dar 's jes' one room for one pusson; de room's a side room, de bed's a single bed; den how 's you gwine to 'com-date two lady visitors?"

"How?" I answered like an echo, then fell to musing; and it did n't help me at all to have Mrs. Nipps rustling around me like a breezy day.

At last I came to a conclusion.

"Well, prepare the side-room, Mrs. Nipps; we can have one visitor, it seems," I said.

"Why, yes," she said, turning me into immediate ridicule. "Why, yes, Mrs. Nipps; why should n't you, Mrs. Nipps? that's all you niggers war made for, Mrs. Nipps, to be bossed from pillar to post by gentlemen in bibbs, who have nuffin' in de world to trouble 'em but other people's business, considerin' as how they a'n't capable of tendin' to their own."

I tried to explain to her my respect for the whole colored race; I tried to impress upon her how it fell to my misfortune (for now I grew to look on it in that light) to be giving her orders; I declared fiercely,—

"I wish there never was such a thing as a visitor known," adding, by way of a parting hint, "what is to be must be, I suppose, and the only thing left for us to do is to be in readiness."

After this I vanished, without even looking at the looming bandanna that I knew shook vengeance at me, for Mrs. Nipps, no doubt, thought three boisterous young madcaps like ourselves were sufficient evil for the present without adding any more to the staff, in whatever guise they came.

But, meeting Pon in the passage, I said, in a confidential whisper, —

"There 's a visitor expected, and will you, like a good little girl, just fix up the spare room?"

"'T is fixed, sah."

"Since when?" I faltered.

"Since de las' time," grinned Pon, vanishing.

I began to despair of ever coming to an understanding, and, rather dolefully, strode in to where the boys awaited my coming; and, after explaining to them the dilemma, added,—

"It is for us to decide quickly which of the two correspondents we are to receive, since but one can come."

"Why, the Regent belle, of course," said Dick.

"Of course we're not going to give the preference to an outcast," said Harry; "Aunt Bawn would never forgive us; and we'd never forgive ourselves in the bargain. Great assurance on her part to have made such a request."

"Just so!" chimed in Dick.

One thing, however, I had resolved upon; and that was the poor Magdalene, so much in need of a downright Samaritan, should be my choice.

"Then I resign further interest in the affair," I said; "I can't agree with you, so go ahead, boys, without me."

After considerable badinage on their part, they drew forth their writing utensils, and became deeply engrossed in answering the Regent's letter. I withdrew to my room and scribbled an apology to the penitent, giving her what consolation I could in words, and telling her to keep up courage, and trust in God. I hurried then to the postoffice, and dropped it safely in the box, then returned and dreamed the night long of packing for college, and Dick and Harry each with a heap of Latin and Greek volumes at their side, which they fired at my nose, in vain efforts to knock it altogether off my face.

It was voted, the following afternoon, that I should take the horse, and repair alone to the depot, where Miss Regent would be likely to arrive at four, in answer to their invitation.

I reached there at the time appointed, and glanced around in vain for the expected guest. At last, a lofty individual, with hat dipped on her nose, and hair bobbed up out of sight, trailed her way down the platform, and seemed searching, with anxious eye, for some one.

I stood irresolute, tapping my boot with my riding-whip, and wondering if this could be the meek, heart-broken penitent I had pictured to myself. Impossible. "And still," reasoned I philosophically, "how can one judge of the heart from outward appearances?"

Led on by this impression. I presently

walked to her side, and, lifting my cap gallantly, asked,—

"Pardon. Is this the lady expected at Barberrry Briar?"

She gave me a look that terminated in an inquiring stare, followed by a leaning forward of the head, and the query,—

"Barberries, did you say? my dear, I am not marketing." And she passed on, her head high in air, and her fingers daintily holding up her skirts; when who should step out, as if from a niche, but Aunt Bawn.

I flung out my hands to the grasp of hers, and gave a cry of delight.

"My dear boy," she said, "are you down here with the horse?"

"Why, yes, aunt," I said, relating, with flushed face and great excitement, the errand that had brought me.

She smiled in a cheerful way, and answered me that it was useless to wait longer, and that we had better drive home.

When we were again assembled in the quaint old parlor, she called us forward, and, to our utter surprise, drew our separate answers to the strange correspondents from her pocket, and read them aloud with measured emphasis, adding, as she again returned them to her pocket,—

"To you, Tom, I award the prize, being able to judge from experience of your principles; they are governed by the mandate, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' You would dare to raise the fallen and bid them hope. So, as tomorrow will be Christmas, we will begin the day by hunting up some breaking heart, and binding it with the hand of charity.

Dick and Harry turned scarlet.

"But, dear aunt, who is the expected Miss Regent?" they asked, quite puzzled.

"She sits before you, as does also Miss Bergine; adding, with a humorous smile, "You see, boys, I have been playing a ruse on you.

They circled around her all the same, wonder changing into cries of "Bravo! oh, bravo, aunt!" their faces glowing with excitement.

But I was exultant over my prize, education being the height of my present ambition. To make up, however, she gave the boys a pony apiece for a Christmas gift, while I, stocked with many a proof of her kindness, repaired to a distant college, where I kept a diary of the "goings-on," for the benefit of the boys in the old farm home, where Aunt Bawn still continues to come and go, her good heart leading her into many a happy contrivance for their benefit.

"OUT OF A FASHION-PLATE."

BY ELIZABETH BIGELOW.

We were dressing for our first party. Lou in pale green silk, with her grandmother's pearls around her white throat and wrists, and strings of tiny sea-shells twined in her blonde hair, looked like a sea-nymph. She has a dainty little figure, and the dress was perfection.

Who would have imagined that Aunt Katherine had had that dress when she was married, ten years before! Lou had the most wonderful "knack" with her fingers; there seemed to be nothing that she could n't do. I thought, sometimes, that it fully made up for her lack of fortune; certainly that and her beauty did,—beauty like a wild rose's, dainty, exquisite, irresistible. Gladly enough would I have changed lots with her,—I with my fortune, my pale, plain face, and my clumsy fingers, that made me almost despair when I found that the smallness of Aunt Katherine's establishment made it necessary for me to dismiss my maid.

Lou stood before the mirror, that night, until Aunt Katherine and I almost lost patience. She was always "a little piece of vanity," as Aunt Katherine declared (though I think she loved Lou, her husband's niece, fully as well as she did me, her own), but tonight it seemed as if she never would be

satisfied with her appearance. To our eyes she was perfection. Her *coiffure*, the work of her own hands, was far more beautiful and "stylish" than the efforts of M. Frizze which adorned Aunt Katherine and me. The pearls and creamy lace set off her pearly shoulders and arms to the greatest advantage. The dress "might have been Worth's," as Aunt Katherine enthusiastically declared. But Lou would have been beautiful dressed as a beggar maid. I thought of Mrs. Browning's lovely lady, —

"Her hair was tawny with gold, her eyes with
purple were dark,
Her cheek's pale opal burned with a red and
a restless spark."

That was Lou exactly; her eyes were purple, just the color of purple violets; the only eyes I ever saw that were.

Suddenly a quick peal of the door-bell echoed through the house.

Janis brought up a great bunch of pink roses; they did n't look like hot-house flowers, — though of course they were, — but all dewy and fresh, as if they had been plucked in the open air. I thought what a suitable gift they were for Lou, and what good taste somebody had.

She tossed the card that came with them

on to the dressing-table, and I read Harry Stuyvesant's name on it. How her eyes shone! I guessed, then, what she had been waiting for. Aunt Katherine guessed, too, I knew by the look she gave me, but I could not understand why it should be an annoyed look; surely nobody could object to Harry Stuyvesant,—of irreproachable morals and manners, of a fine old family, and rich as Croesus.

"Surely, you are not going to wear them, Lou? You 'll spoil the effect of your dress!" said Aunt Katherine, sharply.

"I must wear them!" said Lou, with a pout. "How could anybody resist anything so lovely?"

"And Mr. Stuyvesant's gift too!" said I, teasingly. "But then they will spoil your dress,—sea-nymphs don't wear roses."

"I'll wear them any way," said Lou, decidedly, laying them carefully on her dressing-table, while she wrapped her opera cloak around her. But just then a singular accident happened. Lou had swung the gas burner a little too far around, and a waft of air, caused by the opening of a door, blew the lace drapery of her toilet-table against the flame. In an instant there was a blaze. I snatched Lou's lace handkerchief, and fan, and one or two other costly trifles from the table. Aunt Katherine had sufficient presence of mind to smother the flames with a heavy rug. Lou attempted to rescue the roses,—as if roses were the most precious things in the world!—but it was too late; they were scorched, smouldering, only now and then a pink petal and a faint sweet odor remaining to tell what they had been. I don't know whether Aunt Katherine thought of them, in the excitement, but I saw Lou slyly sweeping the remnants, ashes and all, into a paper, and putting them carefully into a drawer.

"Don't look so melancholy over it, child!" said Aunt Katherine to her, after we had at last got started. "There was very little harm done. We ought to be very thankful that it was no worse."

"There are plenty more roses in the world," whispered I, in Lou's ear in the carriage.

"Yes, but I feel as if it were an evil omen," she said, and then I could see by the street lamps, that she flushed rosy red.

That was the first time I had ever suspected that she really cared for Harry Stuyvesant. He had been very devoted to her

since we had been with Aunt Katherine, but that was only three months, and we heard that he was devoted to other young ladies, too. We had seen nothing of his devotion to others, indeed, but then our glimpses of society had been few. Concerts, an occasional visit to the theatre, two or three very quiet dinner parties, had been the extent of our dissipation. Aunt Katherine's mourning for her husband was the cause of our seclusion. Poor Aunt Katherine! I knew she did not feel like going with us, now, but she declared it was selfish of her to make nuns of us, and she had not meant to do it when she invited us to spend the winter with her, and, accordingly, she had accepted invitations for a large dancing-party. Harry Stuyvesant had been a friend of Aunt Katherine's husband, and he came often to the house. Once or twice the fancy had struck me that it might be Aunt Katherine that he came to see; they were of about the same age—between thirty and thirty-five—and surely Aunt Katherine looked young enough and pretty enough to attract any man. But yet his eyes did not follow her around, as they did Lou, and he did not send her flowers, and music, and books, as he did Lou,—but yet he did, sometimes, though not so often, send me flowers and music and books. It surprised me a little that Lou really cared so much for the flowers that he had sent her. I had not thought she would be won so easily. But she did not wear her heart upon her sleeve in Mr. Harry Stuyvesant's presence, certainly. When I saw the careless little greeting she gave him, as he hastened to her side—something at an indescribable limit between friendliness and indifference—I could scarcely believe that I had seen her preserve the ashes of those roses so tenderly. He asked her for the first dance, but after that he paid her no attention. It was evident that he was a great favorite, and he seemed to distribute his attentions with strict impartiality among about a dozen young ladies. I could see that Lou was hurt and disappointed, and I was seized with sudden anger against Mr. Harry Stuyvesant.

"Aunt Katherine, that is the kind of man that I can't endure!" I said, as I was sitting beside her in an interval between the dances, and watching Mr. Harry Stuyvesant, as he leaned over a very pretty girl in pink, looking completely devoted and ab-

sorbed. "He is a horrid flirt! I begin to see why you don't like to have him devote himself to Lou!"

"No, he is n't a flirt," said Aunt Katherine. "It is perfectly understood in society that he is n't a 'marrying man.' All these girls know that his attentions mean nothing, and he really never makes love to any of them. He says he is looking for one 'noble woman,' and when he finds her he will give all that he possesses in exchange for her. But he declares the sex utterly frivolous, and shallow, and selfish, and despairs of ever finding her."

"He did n't tell *you* that, Aunt Katherine?"

"No, my husband told me; he says it very freely among gentlemen. He has a horror of fashionable women, and if he ever marries I think it will be some member of a church-sisterhood, or hospital nurse, or something of that kind."

"Why does he go into society, then, and make himself so agreeable to fashionable women?" I said, hotly.

"For amusement, I fancy. I think perhaps he had some disappointment that soured him, and then when one looks at his mother and sister one cannot wonder that he has not a very high opinion of women. They are utterly heartless and mercenary."

"If he knew Lou as well as we do would n't he think her the one noble woman?" whispered I.

"I am afraid not. Lou is very fond of dress, and that in his eyes is an unpardonable sin. I don't think he could conceive of a saint in anything but sackcloth."

"A pretty match he would be for a saint!" I said, indignantly. It did arouse my temper to see the pained look in Lou's eyes at his neglect.

"You are too hard upon him, Beth. He has very noble qualities. He is only cynical about women. But I can't have my little Lou's heart broken! He has paid her more marked attentions than I have ever seen him pay any other girl, and I am afraid she is thinking a good deal about him. If it goes on much longer I shall speak to him about it!"

"O Aunt Katherine, that would be so humiliating to Lou! It would be as much as telling him that she is in love with him! And there is no fear but that her pride will keep her from breaking her heart about him!"

Lou danced, and flirted, and laughed. I had never seen her so gay. Once or twice I saw Mr. Stuyvesant's eyes fixed on her with a look which I could scarcely understand. It was both sad and contemptuous.

I danced with him once or twice, and once when he was remarking upon some young lady who was considered a beauty I said, on purpose to draw him out, —

"But she is not so pretty as Lou! Don't you think Lou the loveliest person you ever saw?"

"She is very pretty, but she always looks too much as if she had just stepped out of a fashion-plate for my taste!"

And he said it in such a disagreeable, contemptuous way too! I wanted to ask him if he did n't patronize a fashionable tailor, and why he did n't make himself agreeable to dowdy women if he liked them better, but I was too much provoked to say anything, and I happened to think, too, that he *had* been more attentive that evening to Miss Janet Lavine, who was literary, and strong-minded, and prided herself upon disregard of fashion, than to anybody else.

There was no denying that Lou was fond of dress, but one would scarcely believe how little money she spent on it; she had such a wonderful faculty for making over old things to look new and stylish. And every cent that she spent was of her own earning! What would Mr. Harry Stuyvesant say to that, I wondered. But he was not likely to discover it; nobody in New York knew it, except Aunt Katherine and me, and the editors of two or three daily papers, who did not go into society, and probably would not have thought their fashion reporter of sufficient consequence to gossip about if they had. For "writing up" fashions was what Lou did, and with such success as to support a little brother at school, and provide herself with clothes and spending money as well. Her family history was a very sad one. Her father had once been a wealthy man, and had had large sums of money in his possession, as trustee. He had become involved in unfortunate speculations, and had used and lost these trust funds; utter ruin and exposure followed, and trouble brought on a disease of the brain from which he died. Lou's older brother had left the study of the law, and entered a mercantile house where he was offered a lucrative position, and was nobly devoting himself to repairing the losses of

those who had been entirely ruined by his father's dishonesty. Lou could scarcely speak of her brother Phil without tears of pride and affection in her eyes. She had applied to one of her father's old friends for assistance in obtaining some employment that would support her, and he, a city editor, had helped her to her position as fashion reporter for several papers.

"And it was the very thing for me," said Lou, when she told me of it. "I was always interested in the fashions, and noticed just what everybody wore, and I always had a kind of 'glibness' with my pen. I don't believe George Eliot felt any more pride and satisfaction in 'Middlemarch,' or 'Daniel Deronda,' than I did in my first fashion article. It was so good to know there was something I could do! I had n't been brought up to think of doing anything to earn money, and I knew that I could n't get even a primary school to teach, and to be a burden on my splendid old Phil was not to be thought of,—of course I would have scrubbed floors first."

Lou's great trial was that Aunt Katherine had a pride about having her occupation known, and would make her "sail under false colors," as Lou said. I think it was Aunt Katherine's only weakness, and more for Lou than for herself. She was not afraid of losing caste, she declared, but she "did not want society turning up its nose at Lou because she worked for her living." Lou said that she would n't have come to Aunt Katherine if she had known that she had got to be a "humbug," but she found being there so pleasant that she had n't strength of mind enough to go away.

I wondered very much what Harry Stuyvesant would think of Lou's occupation; whether his aristocratic prejudices would revolt against it, or whether he would consider it "noble." In reality there was nothing especially noble about it, since it was clearly her duty to do something, and that came easiest, but she was very self-denying, spending just as little as she possibly could on herself, turning her back on the thousand little trifles with which girls beautify themselves, and which nobody ever prized more than she, and entirely supported little Rob. She had a sturdy little independence, and would not let either Aunt Katherine or me give her the least tittle.

When I remonstrated with her once

against denying herself a dress that she really needed she said that it "was worrying her dreadfully that she could do no more than to support herself and Rob. She wanted to be helping Phil to pay the debts."

But out of two old dresses which Aunt Katherine had given over to a lumber closet and the moths she evolved a new one for herself which looked like a picture,—probably Mr. Harry Stuyvesant thought, contemptuously, "like a fashion-plate."

To go back to that night. After his delightful remark about a fashion-plate, Harry Stuyvesant seemed inclined to play the agreeable to me, to the seclusion of everybody else. He seemed anxious to talk about Lou, but I was too indignant to gratify him; my curiosity about him led me to talk to him, however; I wanted to know whether Aunt Katherine was right about him, or whether he was only a contemptible flirt as I had been disposed to think. Moreover I was tired of dancing, and we had a cozy corner to ourselves. Once or twice I caught Lou stealing a sly glance in our direction. And then she went to flirting with Carrol Neil, in the most abominable way. He was an insignificant looking little youth of twenty-one, who had just come into possession of a very unassuming blonde mustache, and half a million dollars.

"That seems to be growing serious," said my companion, indicating them.

"What seems to be growing serious?" repeated I, brilliantly.

"The affair between Miss Morrison and young Neil."

"The idea of Lou looking at him!" said I, indignantly.

"She seems to be looking at him now, and, really, a half million is not to be sneezed at!" said this brute.

After that I would not talk to him, and I was relieved when Aunt Katherine said it was time to go. It was some comfort to look back and see my late companion glowering at Lou and Carrol Neil from a secluded corner, and gnawing savagely at his mustache.

"Out of a fashion-plate" or not she evidently had power to move him! Once in the carriage, bound homeward, Lou's gaiety deserted her wholly. She was not only reticent but decidedly acid in her manner to me. But she evidently repented, and atoned for it by an uncommonly vigorous

hug when we separated that night. Bless her dear heart! she need n't have been jealous of me. All girls think their hero is a hero to everybody, but the truth was that Mr. Harry Stuyvesant was not by any means a hero in my eyes and I had no fancy for flirting, and, moreover, I had had my dream,—a very “frail and fleeting” dream, romantic and foolish to the last degree, but none the less I cherished it. I had met my hero while blockaded by a snow-bank, in traveling from New York to the West. He had given needed services, and genial companionship to us,—Aunt Alice and me,—and traveling with him for three days made him seem like an old friend. I was both pained and surprised when he took leave of us without so much as revealing his name. Of course it was natural and proper that I should forget him, at once, but unfortunately I did not do what was natural and proper. I do not mean that I regarded myself as a “blighted being,” or spent any part of my days and nights in weeping; but in all my dreams of the future my mysterious fellow-traveler bore a part. I compared every man I met with him, and they were always the losers. Three years had not made his image less in my mind, and calling myself an idiot, as I often did, had no effect. But it was Lou's story, not mine, that I began to tell.

From that night Lou persistently avoided Harry Stuyvesant, even refusing to go down when he called. I fancied that it was not so much pique at his having neglected her as it was surprise and affright that his neglect could so wound her. She devoted herself to her work, with new diligence. She wished to add another newspaper to her list, but, failing in that, she wrote letters—bright, spicy letters they were, too—to the newspaper in her native town, and in that way added a little to her revenue. She flirted at all the parties we went to, and was acquiring the reputation of a belle, but all her heart seemed bent on money-making.

When I remonstrated with her, one day, for being so absorbed in her work that she had very little time for her friends, she said,—

“I came very near to forgetting my aim in life once, I want to be sure not to again!”

Aunt Katherine, who was in the room, said, playfully,—

“You are a dreadfully mercenary child!

You don't seem to think that anything is of any account except money.”

“I don't know as I do,” said Lou. “I believe the old saying ought to be, ‘Money alone is happiness below!’”

Now of all unlucky things that ever happened was n't it the unluckiest that Harry Stuyvesant should be just outside the open parlor door where he could not fail to hear that last remark of Lou's? He came in with such a disagreeable, sarcastic smile on his face! Lou flushed a little, but she was as indifferent—not to say saucy—as possible in her manner. He watched her narrowly that day,—he had a habit of watching her that extended to the verge of rudeness,—and Lou was full of reckless quips and gayety. As usually happens he seemed much more anxious for her favor now that she resolutely turned the cold shoulder upon him! At large assemblies where Lou had a throng around her he usually kept aloof, but at theatres and concerts when his position as a friend of the family gave him the privilege he was always by her side, and that in spite of her decided coldness. Watching them both I decided that they were really in love with each other, and that it was a great pity that “the course of true love” could n't “run smooth.” I wanted to help it along, but had a perfect horror of matchmaking, and was very much afraid of being a marplot. So I contented myself with enthusiastic praises of Lou, whenever he spoke of her,—and he seemed very fond of talking of her. Once I spoke of her as very “unselfish” and “unworldly.”

“Is she really that?” he asked me, eagerly, but with a strong accent of doubt. “She seems to me to care a great deal for fashion and frivolity. Do you think, for instance, that she would marry a poor man?”

“Yes, if she loved him.”

“Of course I mean if she loved him,” he said, and strode away gnawing his moustache, as he always did when he was disturbed.

Poor Lou! she would have been happier if she had known what the subject of Harry Stuyvesant's confidential conversations with me always was.

One day he informed me that he had resolved upon employing a subterfuge to settle his fate. He was going to tell Lou that he had lost all his money, and then ask her to marry him! I did think the brilliant

Mr. Stuyvesant might have devised a more original plot than that, and I was disgusted with him for suspecting Lou of being mercenary! I thought that when she discovered his deceit she would find it hard to forgive him for having doubted her so; and I said as much to him. But he was determined to try it; his morbid suspicion of all women seemed to me like an incurable malady. Sometimes he seemed to think that Lou loved him; at other times he was furiously jealous of Carroll Neil, with whom, it must be acknowledged, Lou was carrying on a very lively flirtation.

Harry Stuyvesant came to the house, one day, and asked for Lou only. That was unusual, and Lou's cheeks burned as she went down. He had come to tell her that his money was all gone, and he loved her! I knew, I did not doubt for a moment, that Lou's happiness would be full, money or no money. I was very much surprised when, in less than fifteen minutes, I saw him go away, and Lou ran up to her room without a word to anybody. When she came down to dinner there were traces of tears on her face. I felt sure, by the expression of Harry Stuyvesant's face, as he went away, that he had asked her to marry him, and been refused, and I could not understand it.

"Lou," said I, as soon as we were alone, "Harry Stuyvesant is a brute! Don't you shed a tear for him!"

"He is n't a brute!" she cried, turning upon me fiercely. "He is the noblest man that ever lived!"

"Then why don't you marry him?" said I.

"O Beth, I can't marry anybody! Can I leave Phil to pay those horrid debts, and take care of Robby too? just now when I can earn so much money! And he is poor, too,—Harry: he has lost all his money! If he had been rich I would n't have minded his taking care of Robby, but that makes it perfectly impossible! And I was just as cold and hard as I could be, because I was afraid I could n't hold out if I told him all about it, and he urged me! I did own that I loved him, before I knew it, and he went away thinking that I would n't marry him because I was afraid of poverty! that I cared more for fashion and display than for him,—that was what he said,—when, O Beth! poverty and hardship and work would be nothing to me, for his sake!"

After that we saw nothing of Mr. Harry Stuyvesant for some time. He disappeared as suddenly as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. We heard that he had gone on a journey, but whither nobody seemed to know. Lou lost her zest for society, gave Carroll Neil and two or three other adorers over to despair, and put her whole soul into her work, and Aunt Katherine began to predict that we were going to have a literary celebrity in the family. After a month or two we heard that Harry Stuyvesant had returned, and close upon his return followed a report that he had lost his fortune.

He did not come to the house, but one morning I met him, by chance, in a picture store, looking woe-begone to the last degree.

"What do you think of this for the irony of fate?" he asked. "When I told her that I was a pauper I had no more idea that it would be true, within three weeks, than I had that I should be elected president within that time. The first blow fell the very next day; another and another followed. Today I am here to negotiate for the sale of my collection of pictures to keep a roof over my mother's head!"

I knew he had been a connoisseur and collector, for years, and his pictures were very dear to his heart. I wondered if losing Lou came any harder to him! But I was ashamed of my doubt when I spoke of Lou. He tried to look sarcastic and contemptuous, but the pain would not be hidden. I don't know how I found courage,—I suppose I had no right,—but I did tell him then what she had said to me of her reasons for refusing him. I never saw any man's face brighten as his did,—but only for a moment; then he made the same remark about himself that I had made.

"I was a brute,—and a blind fool, too! My instinct always told me that she was an angel, and if it had not been for my miserable, suspicious nature—but it is not too late! I believe she loves me, as little as I deserve it (you see I had not told him quite all); and though I can't give her the luxury I could, I can fight poverty with a will when I have her to work for!"

"But I don't believe she will marry you!" said I, with friendly frankness. "Her purpose is so strong to help pay her father's debts,—or at least to support her brother."

"A little thing like that paying her father's debts! it's too absurd!" and he laughed a laugh that really sounded as if he were happy. He went on, "But she's a noble woman,—a regular little saint!"

"Out of a fashion-plate!" added I, mischievously.

But when I saw how sincere was his repentance and his wrath against himself I spared him any further reminders. But whether things would have come out right, even then, I do not know, but for an "interposition of Providence."

I hurried home that day, with some idea of trying to soften Lou's views of duty before Harry Stuyvesant could get through with his business with the picture-dealer. I knew that he would lose no time in seeking Lou, after that.

When I opened the parlor door, there, cozily talking with Lou, sat my traveling companion,—the hero of my dreams. I was so amazed and bewildered that I have

no recollection of anything that passed, except that Lou introduced him as "brother Phil." Lou says that there was a surprising amount of blushing and stammering, on both sides, for two people ordinarily well-behaved and self-possessed. As this is not my story, I will hasten to say that "Phil" staid three weeks, and before he left arrangements were made for a wedding the next fall, in which he and I were the persons chiefly interested; and I had so far succeeded in convincing Phil that my worldly goods were his, that there would be no further need of Lou's helping to pay her father's debts,—those debts which Phil had felt to be such a disgrace that he would not even tell me his name when we first met. And so Harry Stuyvesant persuaded Lou to share his poverty, which, as he has a profession, plenty of brains, and a fair share of "backbone," is not likely to remain poverty for long,—but I shall always think she is too good for him!